

The Next Great Journey

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Summary: After the destruction of Requiem and an attack against Earth, both the UNSC and Covenant Separatist form the Systems Alliance. Then a discovery in the Deca-5 system changes everything for all sides. Cold War like conflict before actual war, lots of ONI, AU for Mass Effect and a council that actually thinks before it acts. On Hiatus until further notice.

1. Timeline and Discoveries

The Next Great Journey

****A/N:** Readers, first I would like to state here that this is the first story that I write and also that English is my second language, so if you see any errors in grammar, punctuation, etc. please tell me about them, I would highly appreciate that.**

****Now,** this story is cannon for the halo part of the story until the destruction of Requiem, in the Mass Effect part of the story in will be all AU except for some details (Timeline till 2155 is the same, Alien species, weapons, abilities, ships designs, the Krogan's, Batarian's, Quarian's, and Geth's place on the galaxy, the Terminus systems also will be exactly the same).**

****What** you will mostly see and notice in the Mass Effect part of the story is that the council use more common sense and tactics to deal with a potential enemy that is superior to them in most of the space parts of battle but in equal terms of ground battle, also the council will be using a LOT the STG and SPECTRES to make illegal operations that will give them either more information on the enemy, or advantages in the cold war and total war parts on this story.**

****In** the Halo part of the story you will notice that the UNSC and the UEG will rely more on ONI (after all they are the intelligence part of the military), also the Loyalist Covenant will be playing a big part on this story as will be the Separatist. Furthermore do NOT

expect to see Cortana coming back like a super AI that can do everything like a Forerunner AI, and also Master Chief will be part of the story but he will not be in all chapters and battles/operations.**

The Mass Effect timeline starts on the year 2155.

The Halo timeline starts on the year 2557.

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Now into the story:

Chapter 1: Timeline and Discoveries

2155/2557:

 After the destruction of Requiem, Infinity and its battle group of Strident-class heavy frigates return to the Solar System.

2155/2557:

 The UNSC's high command discuss options to deal with Catherine Halsey's betrayal of humanity. In the end, it's decided for ONI to send prowlers to locate and eliminate Halsey in accordance to the COLE protocol.

2156/2558:

 Covenant Loyalist forces attack the colony of Sanctuary in order to create a distraction for the UNSC and the Separatists. Loyalist forces use the distraction to enter UNSC space and establish an operations base. In response, the fleet of Redeeming Souls is sent to recuperate Sanctuary. The fleet consists of 4 CAS-class assault carriers, 12 CCS Battlecruisers, 15 CPV-class heavy destroyers, and 20 SDV-class corvettes.

2156/2558:

 After 5 months of battle for Sanctuary, Separatist forces win the battle after losing 3 CAS-class assault carriers, 5 CCS Battlecruisers, 8 CPV-class heavy destroyers, and 10 SDV-class corvettes. Loyalist forces successfully establish an operational base inside the Corelius nebula, hiding their presence from UNSC patrols, plans for an invasion to Earth commence.

2157/2559:

 Saren Arterius becomes the youngest SPECTRE after successfully stopping Batarian pirate forces, from invading a Turian civilian colony in the edge of the Hades cluster.

2158/2560:

 The UNSC and the UEG send a message to the Separatist forces inviting them to a conference above Earth in order to establish an alliance. During the conference an invasion fleet of Loyalist forces in Slip-space is detected heading for the Solar System.

2158/2560:

 10 minutes after detection, the Loyalist fleet exits Slip-space close to Earth. The fleet consists of 40 CSO-class supercarriers, 60 CAS-class assault carriers, 68 CCS Battlecruisers, 20 CPV-class heavy destroyers, and 80 SDV-class corvettes.

The Earth defense fleet, with the aid of the Separatist endeavor, engages the Loyalist fleet. After a close battle, the Earth defense fleet and the Separatist forces win against the Loyalist suffering a total of 60% of losses for the defense fleet and a 55% loss of the Separatist endeavor. Once the losses are accounted for, the UNSC and

UEG government decide to establish an alliance with the Separatist Covenant, thus creating the Systems Alliance (Noted that both of the ex-factions will still design their ship's classes, but they will share technology; also their ships will have armaments from both Human and Covenant design, and their fleets will be composed of mixed personal and ship's designs).

****2159/2561****: The newly formed Systems Alliance undercovers an operation directed by ONI against the Sangheili government. In a fast move made by the Alliance, they manage to trap and kill the current leaders of ONI and all personnel involved on the operation against the Sangheili.

****2160/2562****: ONI is reformed and is now under the control of the System Alliance military branch, the UNSC. Jason Patterson is appointed as new head of ONI after showing impressive skills in all intelligence departments for war time situations.

****2161/2563****: ONI stealth prowlers locate Catherine Halsey and Jul M'Dama in unexplored space. Jason Patterson, leader of ONI, authorizes the deployment of a SHIVA bomb to disable Jul M'Dama's fleet and give SPARTAN team Gladiator a window to infiltrate M'Dama's ship.

****2161/2563****: SPARTAN team Gladiator kills Dr. Halsey, but Jul M'Dama manages to escape in a SDV-class corvette to Loyalist Space. The other half of the Janus key is still under Loyalist custody.

****2161/2563****: The Citadel Council authorizes the activation of relay-217 in hopes of acquiring new resources for the implement of the Citadel fleets.

****2166/2568****: In order to improve relations between the Systems Alliance's citizens, the colony of Phoenix, in the system Deca-5, is founded. The construction of Arcturus Station commences, the station will serve as the new capital for the System Alliance. Its location will be in one of the most protected systems inside Alliance space.

After 5 years of establishment and mining operations in the system beyond relay-217, now named Prometheus, the Citadel Council begins construction of more vessels, especially dreadnoughts, stating that it is for the protection of future, unexplored as of yet, Council space.

****2170/2572****: After 5 years since the inauguration of the Phoenix colony, the relationship between former Separatist Covenant and Humans have greatly improved to a level where there is respect and no hostility between them. (It will still take decades before most of the resentments of the Covenant war disappear). Currently there is only 1% of the System Alliance population that doesn't believe in this coexistence, preferring to take extremist actions against their former enemies.

Systems Alliance expansion on the Orion arm of the galaxy, has reached a seventy-eight percent, consisting in a total of approximately nine hundred and fifty worlds. Planets that were glassed during the Human-Covenant war have been terraformed to a point where in a few years they'll be restored to their pre-war

status.

****2171/2573****: Systems Alliance fleets have been restored to pre-war levels thanks to the cooperation between species and the discovery of 2 more shield words inside their territory. Construction of Arcturus station is finished, with a height of 1000km, a length of 978km, and a width of 783km, it is located in the system Reincarnation.

Citadel Council activates a second relay located inside the Prometheus system. Once on the other side of the relay, the Citadel discovers a colossal structure resembling a ring, with dimensions similar to the orbiting planet. STG, commandos, archeologist and 3 SPECTRES, are deployed on the ring for study. Once the insertion groups were detected on the ring's surface, the Oracle of the ring, 216-Redeemer, activated a full lockdown on the ring after confirming that none of the species were reclaimers. Stealth sentinels are deployed to observe the newcomers.

****2172/2574****: After the discovery of the Big Ring, the Citadel Council banned the activation of more relays in order to concentrate on the investigation of the ring. The purpose of the Big Ring it's still unknown. The difficulty to open the structures on the ring, and the defenses of the few structures that the Citadel has managed to open, complicates the study of the facilities.

****2172/2574****: The Systems Alliance discovers an anomaly at the edge of the system Deca-5, planetoid M4578S is the source of said anomalies. Investigation group Foxtrot has been deployed to investigate.

****September 5, 2574, 2147 Hours, Systems Alliance Calendar, Deca-5 system, CPV-Class Heavy Destroyer****_ESTEEM_****, Close to planetoid M4578S.****

Shipmaster Orna 'Fulsamee observed the readings sent from the probes observing the planetoid. For the past hour, his investigation group, have been analyzing the data transmitted from the probes observing the planet. To say that he had no idea what most of that data mean was an accurate statement, but what he did know was the feeling that something big, in a good or bad way being up for debate, will happen. Thus why he had his fleet consisting of one CPV-class Heavy Destroyer, two UNSC-class Stalwart light frigates, two SDV-Class corvettes, and three Civilian vessels on alert, just in case the worst happened.

"Shipmaster," the ship's communications specialist Petty Officer 3rd Class Uptac said, "We have an incoming transmission from the Liberty. Do you want me to pass it through?"

"Yes, let's see what the scientists have to say about all this," Orna said.

Nodding, Uptac put the transmission on the communications screen. Looking at the communications screen, Orna saw a female human with an identification saying Elena Ramirez.

"Shipmaster," Elena said as she looked through some data-pads.

"Doctor, I presume that you know what is happening on the surface of

the planetoid?" Orna asked.

"Based on the analysis made by the probes and the scans from your ship, we have determined that M4578S is suffering a magnetic field transition. Also, seismic activity has been detected on the surface, as well as, several formations of holes that reach the nucleus of the planetoid, " Elena explained.

"So you are telling me that a planetoid, that it's supposed to have zero seismic activity, its having multiple tremors on its surface? Also, why are these holes appearing?" Orna asked with confusion.

"Based on the scans made by your ship and the AI aboard the _Fair weather_, we have determined that something inside M4578S is causing all this anomalies," Elena stated while looking at a data-pad, "Also, based in the quantities of energy emitted from M4578S, we are predicting that in a few hours M4578S will be destroyed because of this massive energy outputs," Orna could only wonder what this information could mean to the Alliance, if what the doctor said was true, which probably was, this meant that potentially something of value could be inside the planetoid, but what it was it was anyone's guess, "Shipmaster I require a permission to take a closer look to M4578S, that way we can make more accurate scans of the energy output. If we can determine what kind of energy the planetoid is emitting, we could have a more accurate guess on what is happening inside M4578S."

Orna considered what the doctor told him, if he didn't give her permission, the fleet defending Phoenix could be at a disadvantage if what was happening inside the planetoid was something extremely dangerous, but if he give the doctor permission to continue their scans, the fleet defending phoenix could be alerted in time just in case the worst happened. Knowing that he could very well loose part of the investigation group with that decision, Orna made up his mind.

"Permission granted doctor, but at the first sign of trouble pull back immediately, got it?" Orna said with a stern gaze.

"Affirmative Shipmaster," Elena said before ending the connection.

Orna sighted as he looked at the bridge, "Officer R'das," he said to his systems Petty officer 3rd class, "I want you to scan the _Liberty_ and the _Fair weather_ once they get close to the planetoid. Any change in their diagnostics and you are to inform me immediately."

"Of course Shipmaster," said R'das before turning back to his console.

"Uptac, contact high command and transfer the transmission to my headquarters, they will want to know what's happening here," said Orna.

"Yes shipmaster."

"Commander Nor 'Kros, you have the bridge until I return, if something happens inform me at once."

"As you command shipmaster," answered 'Kros.

With his orders given, Orna made his way to his headquarters in order to talk with high command and explain the situation. With some luck, this events would signify something good for the Alliance.

****September 5, 2574, 2230 Hours, Systems Alliance Calendar, Deca-5 system,**** ****Stalwart Light Frigate****_Fair Weather_****,** Orbit around planetoid M4578S.**

Captain Frederick Stuart, a veteran of the Human-Covenant war, hopped that the eggheads aboard the _Liberty_ knew what they were doing. After receiving the orders from Shipmaster Orna, to escort the _Liberty_ closer to the planetoid, he wondered if he received enough money to get this close to those expulsions of energy from the planet, that for all he knew that energy could kill him the instant it reached him. It wasn't that he didn't liked the assignment, but since this operation started, he had the presentment that this energy dilemma was bad news.

"Raven, how are the scans going?" Frederick asked the AI of the ship Raven, which actually looked like a Raven, 'seriously, who names AI's this days?' Frederick thought sarcastically.

"Seventy percent complete captain, we will finish the scans in two minutes and thirty-seven seconds," Raven answered.

"Noted. Lieutenant Rogers contact the _Liberty_," Frederick said to communications, 'let's see what the doctor has to say about the data' he thought.

"Yes Captain," answered Rogers, "_Liberty_ on screen sir."

Frederick looked at the communications screen, seeing Dr. Ramirez and 3 other eggheads checking data streams on the multiple holo-screens on the bridge of the _Liberty_.

"Yes Captain?" the doctor asked.

"Dr. Ramirez I want a report, what are we dealing with here?" he asked.

Elena took a minute to respond, checking data and giving directions to her colleges, then she answered, "Based on the scans Captain, we have determined that we are dealing with energy only found on dark matter, finally, the energy output has increased by a factor of six since our last scan."

Frederick took a moment to process what he was told before asking, "Does this energy will affect us?"

"Unlikely, while this amount of energy is troubling, our ship's shields should be able to deflect most of it," She answered.

"Most of it? What happens with the rest that penetrates our shields?" Frederick inquired.

"The little energy that is not being deflected its actually

fortifying our shields," The doctor answered while Frederick wondered how that was happening, but before he could ask, Raven said.

"Captain, I'm detecting grand spikes of energy increase inside M4578S, also seismic activity is off the charts. I suggest that we pull back, at this rate, that quantity of energy will destroy M4578S in minutes," Raven sated in a calm voice.

Once Frederick heard that, he looked back at the doctor, "Dr. Ramirez, I want the Liberty back on formation with the rest of the investigation group, now," He said with a tone of voice that gave no space for excuses.

"Yes Captain," the doctor said with disappointment in her voice before disconnecting the line. It wasn't that she wanted to get the crew aboard the Liberty killed, but this was probably the closest they would get to study this type of energy in a long time.

"Raven, pull the ship back in formation."

"Yes captain, pulling back now."

Frederick just watched the planetoid in what he assumed were its last minutes of existence.

****September 5, 2574, 2309 Hours, Systems Alliance Calendar, Deca-5 system, CPV-Class Heavy Destroyer****_ESTEEM_****, Close to planetoid M4578S.****

Once Orna received word of what was happening outside, he cut the transmission with high command and made his way to the bridge. With the situation explained to high command, they decided to send the Fast Response Fleet (FRF) Alpha, which consisted of four CCS-Class Battlecruisers, five UNSC Destroyers, five UNSC Halcyon-class light cruisers, eight SDV-Class heavy corvettes, and three UNSC Strident-Class Heavy Frigates. The ships would be arriving to the system in thirty minutes. If the worst happened, at least they would be prepared.

When Orna arrived to the bridge, he saw that the investigation group was in formation and away from M4578S; but that wasn't what stopped him in his tracks, the fact that M4578S had disappeared and its place was a fork like structure did. The structure had a brilliant blue miniaturized star on its left side. Said star was surrounded by three rings rotating in different trajectories around it, all of them connected to the fork like structure, with the debris of M4578S floating around said structure.

"For the gods, Commander what just happened?!" Orna asked totally surprised by what he was seeing.

"Shipmaster, apparently that structure destroyed the planetoid after the energy in the object increased," commander 'Kros answered in a similar state of shock.

"Uptac, contact Captain Stuart of the Fair Weather and Doctor Elena of the Liberty at once, I want to know the details of this event," Shipmaster Orna ordered, "Also, I want the investigation group in red alert, tell all ships to have weapons ready and shields at full

force; send a message to the civilian ships, I want them behind the frigates."

"At once shipmaster," Uptac stated, "Shipmaster, Captain Stuart and Dr. Elena are on screen," he announced seconds later.

Orna turned to the communications screen noticing the worried expression of the captain, likely because he, like him, could tell that this situation could turn very dangerous any minute now. Looking at the doctor, he noticed, in contrast to him and the Captain, that she had an excited expression. Like all the scientific minds that he had known, she was fascinated by the new artifact, just as his people were when they would find any Forerunner relics during the Great War and before. Sometimes, Orna asked himself if the Humans and the Sangheili were more similar than different, but that would have to wait as he had more pressing matters at hand right now.

"Captain, Doctor," he greeted, "I presume that you are informed of the interesting developments that happened," They both nodded, comprehending immediately of what the shipmaster was talking about. "Doctor could you please explain what exactly happened?" he asked.

Elena took some seconds to form an answer before saying, "Shipmaster, Captain; it appears that when the object liberated that enormous spike of energy, M4578S couldn't retain the energy any longer, thus making the planetoid collapse on itself. Further readings and analysis of the object have concluded that the object appears dormant in a way. I suggest that we take a closer look to have better readings."

"Shipmaster if I may?" Captain Stuart asked. At seeing Orna's nod, he continued, "Wouldn't be better if we wait for reinforcements in case this situation goes south? I mean, the object, now designated Tango 1, managed to send a big wave of unknown energy while it was dormant. If what Dr. Ramirez says is correct, then if we accidentally activate it while investigating it, we could make this situation a dangerous one for us and the colony. If we wait for reinforcements and the worst happens, we could be more prepared to deal with whatever it is going to happen more easily."

Orna considered both suggestions, and while he was curious as to what this object was and what was it that its purpose was, he knew that Captain Stuart's suggestion was more appropriate for the current situation. With that in mind he gave his orders.

"Doctor, prepare your team to investigate the object. You and your team will be deployed in a Pelican escorted by two Banshees in forty minutes. Captain, your frigate will be close to the investigation team for extraction in case something happens. I have been informed that the Fast Response Fleet (FRF) Alpha will arrive in twenty minutes," Orna watched as Captain Stuart relaxed a bit after hearing that reinforcements were in route to the system. Acknowledging his orders, he disconnected the line, the Doctor following short after. 'At least we will be prepared in case something goes wrong' Orna thought.

September 5, 2574, 2334 Hours, Systems Alliance Calendar, In Route to Deca-5 system, CCS-Class Battlecruiser**_Purity of Spirit_****, 5 minutes to exit Slip-space.**

Fleet master Qunu looked at the report of what was happening in the Deca-5 system, to say that he was worried about the meaning of this was an understatement. Knowing that this discovery would change the way the Systems Alliance viewed the rest of the galaxy. If this situation went in a positive way, it would open more possibilities for the Alliance, but if it went south, then he didn't want to imagine the repercussions of this. Qunu had fought in the final years of the Great War, and despite the fact that his people are a warrior race, he didn't want to fight another war unless it was for the right reasons. After all, for all that he knew, this device could be a trap from the Loyalists or from another race that wanted to exterminate them.

"Fleet master, we are exiting slip-space." Announced Lieutenant Tala 'Lira, successfully taking him out of his thoughts.

"Understood. Navigation, show me the status of the fleets in the system," Qunu ordered.

"Yes Fleet master," the navigations officer answered while showing in the tactical display the status of the fleets.

After analyzing the situation of the fleet, Qunu distributed his fleet to offer maximum protection to the colony and the investigation group while this situation was resolved.

"Crewman Robert, transmit the following orders to the fleet and the Defense Fleet of Phoenix: I want the UNSC Destroyers _Armageddon's Edge_ and _Iroquois_, and the SDC-class corvettes _Solstice_, _Redeemer_, _Lightning strike_, and _Adamant Prayer_ to accompany my ship to the location of the investigation group. The rest of the fleet is to maintain position at sector 6B," Qunu ordered.

"Yes Sir," Robert answered while transmitting the new orders.

"Contact the CPV-Class Heavy Destroyer _ESTEEM_," Qunu ordered.

"_ESTEEM_ on screen Fleet master," Robert said.

Qunu looked at the screen, seeing shipmaster Orna's controlled expression on screen.

"Fleet master," Orna greeted.

"Shipmaster Orna, I trust everything is under control?" he asked

"Affirmative Fleet master," Orna answered.

"Good, what's the situation shipmaster?"

"After reading heavy sparks of energy on the planetoid, we decided to pull back the investigation teams. Once we made it back to a safe distance, we observed how M4578S imploded in itself revealing the artifact designated Tango 1. I give my authorization to deploy a science team to further investigate the artifact. One of my Pelicans, escorted by two Banshees and the frigate _Fair Weather_, are going to

be deployed in five minutes," Orna replied.

"Good work Shipmaster continue the operation, we'll be on standby in case something happens, Fleet master out," cutting the transmission Qunu observed the situation unfold in front of him.

September 5, 2574, 2344 Hours, Systems Alliance Calendar, Deca-5 system, Pelican Drop Ship**_Delta-309_****, In Route to Tango 1 Artifact.**

Doctor Elena Ramirez was excited, this was going to be the one of the biggest discovers that the Alliance had made, and she was sure of it. After all, how many times did you discovered and artifact that worked using dark matter?

"Doctor we are in range to scan the artifact, do you want me to proceed?" asked the pilot.

"Affirmative, commence scans," she said.

"Copy Doctor, commencing scans now," replied the pilot.

"Wallace, I want you to check the spectrum analysis of the object, Davis look for any kind of transmissions or signals from the artifact," ordered Elena.

"Yes ma'am," replied Wallace and Davis.

"Doctor, spectrum analysis report that Tango one is having a constant fluid of energy," informed Wallace a few minutes later.

"Understood keep scanning, Davis report?" Elena replied.

"Doctor I'm receiving some kind of message covered in static from the artifact. I can't clear it, what do you want me to do?" asked Davis.

"We'll get closer, let's see if you can clear it that way and if you can't, then try answering the message."

"Okay Doctor," replied Davis

"Pilot get closer to the artifact," Elena ordered.

"Copy that ma'am" the pilot answered, "getting closer to Tango 1"

Once the Pelican started moving, Elena could feel the gravitational pull that the artifact had on the drop ship.

"Davis can you clear that message?" she asked.

"Negative, I'm sending a signal right now," Davis answered while sending the signal.

"Doctor? What's happening? Tango 1 is showing an increase of activity. It is pulling us to it, retreating from Tango 1 now over," The pilot informed.

Elena could indeed feel the pull of the artifact, and she couldn't

agree more with the pilot at the moment. The Pelican tried to go back towards the fleet but apparently the artifact had other ideas.

"Here Pelican Delta-309, we are getting pulled towards Tango 1 and we can't pull back, repeat we are getting pulled towards Tango 1 and we can't pull back, I request an extraction over."

"Here Frigate Fair Weather coming for extraction, please stay on standby ETA ninety seconds, over."

"Understood," the pilot answered while trying to pull the Pelican away from the artifact but it was all in vain because thirty seconds after the message was sent, the artifact let loose a blue type of energy that evolved the Pelican. In a flash of light, the Pelican was sent at a bigger speed than the speed of light towards the unknown.

September 6, 2574, 0000 Hours, Systems Alliance Calendar, Unknown system, Pelican Drop Ship**_Delta-309_****.**

"System are fried, it appears that Tango 1 killed all the system except vital support Doctor," The pilot informed Doctor Elena.

"Understood pilot let's hope that the Alliance send someone for us." Elena said while trying to get the systems online with the help of the other 2 scientist.

September 6, 2574, 0000 Hours, Systems Alliance Calendar, Deca-5 system, CCS-Class Battlecruiser**_Purity of Spirit_****, Observing Tango 1 Artifact.**

When Fleet master Qunu watched the drop ship get fired like a MAC cannon round across the fabric of space, he didn't know what to think, which why he contacted the CPV-Class Heavy Destroyer ESTEEM and the Stalwart Light Frigate Fair Weather to assert the situation at hand.

"Captain Stuart, what can your construct tell us about this incident?" Qunu asked.

"Fleet master, it appears that Tango 1 is a transportation device of some sort according to the readings that Raven got once the Pelican got shot into space," replied Stuart.

"Fleet master, if that is the case I offer my ship to go after the pelican and rescue them," Orna Offered.

"We aren't taking any chances here shipmaster, your ships as well as, Captain Stuart's ship, the UNSC Destroyers Armageddon's Edge and Iroquois, will accompany my ship through the artifact and extract the Pelican. We can't lose the lives of those brave souls that risked their lives for the understanding of this artifact." Both the Captain and the Shipmaster nodded, then they closed the line to prepare their ships.

"Crewman Rogers, inform the UNSC Destroyers Armageddon's Edge and Iroquois that they are accompany us to go through the artifact with the Fair Weather and the Esteem," Qunu ordered.

"Yes sir," Replied Rogers.

'Let's see what await us in the other side of this artifact', thought Qunu before their ships were evolved in the brilliant light and was shot towards the fabric of space.

****September 6, 2574, 0010 Hours, Systems Alliance Calendar, Unknown system, CCS-Class Battlecruiser****_Purity of Spirit._****

Once the group of 5 ships made it through the artifact, Fleet master Qunu turned to the bridge, "Lieutenant 'Lira, fleet report"

"Fleet master all ships report operational, the Destroyers report reactors at hundred and thirty seven percent of capacity and shields at seventy percent. The _Fair Weather_ reports shields at fifty percent and the reactor at hundred and twelve percent, finally the Esteem reports shields at eighty six percent and the reactor at hundred and twenty percent. Our ship has shields at ninety percent and the reactor is at one hundred forty one sir," Replied 'Lira, "Sir, all ships report that all systems are returning to normal"

"Understood _Fair Weather_, ensign start scanning the system, Robert, inform the _Fair Weather_ to locate the Pelican, also inform the Destroyers to prepare weapons in case we find hostiles, finally tell all ships to be under red alert" Qunu ordered.

"At once sir," replied Robert, "Sir they reports that they have found the pelican, extraction operations are initiating it right now," Robert informed.

"Fleet Master," 'Lira announced, "Scan of system complete, I detect another artifact identical to Tango 1, also fifteen unknown contacts are around the second planet closest to the star in the system, and ten unknown contacts are approaching to our position. From the looks of it, they appear to be six Corvettes, three Light Frigates, and one Heavy Frigate to our standards sir," 'Lira informed.

Qunu could only hope that this situation did not extend to a conflict between this unknowns and the Alliance.

****Chapter edited on 10/8/15****

****A/N:** So here we go the first chapter of the story, I'm sorry to inform that I don't know when I'll be able to post the nest chapter but I'll do it as soon as I can, I promise. Also, please review and tell me what you think, give me suggestions and ideas for this story, I'll consider each one of them and I'll see what can I do to include them. Finally, I'm in the need of various OCs especially alien ones, please specify the next information for the OC: Species, Name, Rank (if military), Branch in the military (if military), and specializations. Thanks for reading, until the next chapter.******

2. First Contact and First Strikes

****The Next Great Journey****

****A/N:** Thanks for the reviews I highly appreciated them. Now, on one of the reviews they informed me that a reactor can't get to more than

100%, while I agree with the logic of it, here is why this is possible: the reactors generally produce and can store enormous quantities of energy, that's why when a reactor it's at 100% capacity, it refers to the safe quantities of energy that can be used, when it gets above the 100% mark the rest of the energy can overheat and make the reactor explode. When that happens, it is said that the reactor is over 100% capacity and that it needs to ventilate that energy to prevent accidents. That's the reasoning why I said the reactors on the ships were over 100%. In another note, the main idea of how the First Contact situation went, was thanks to****Omnipotentatus, all credit goes to him. I just added the fitting pieces to the idea.**

Disclaimer: I don't own Halo or Mass Effect both belong to their respective owners.

Now onto next chapter.

Chapter 2: First Contact and First Strikes

September 6, 2574, 0000 Hours, Systems Alliance Calendar, Deca-5 system, CCS-Class Battlecruiser**_Triumphant Declaration_****, on Standby in Sector 6B.**

Once the rescue team made it through Tango 1, Shipmaster Sulva, an Unggoy that was a veteran of the Great War and a survivor in combat against the Flood forces, received a message stating that he was in command of the fleet until the Fleet Master returned.

He was looking at the tactical screen, thinking on the situation at hand, then he ordered, "Communications, tell all the ships of the Alpha Fast Response Fleet to regroup with us at 10 mikes from Tango 1. Also, inform the Investigation group Foxtrot that they are to return with the Phoenix defense fleet."

"Yes Shipmaster," answered communications Junior Lieutenant Upla.

Sulva nodded before turning to the tactical screen, observing the object that was the cause of all this trouble.

September 5, 2172, 2300 Hours, Citadel Council Calendar, Voyager Cluster, Pheiros outpost, 1 Hour before Contact.

General Illo Nazario, the current commanding officer of Pheiros outpost, was observing his subordinates, which were in turn observing the systems' console that monitored the Voyager Cluster for any kind of activity. The reason why this outpost was here on the first place, was because, in the last 3 months sightings of Geth activity around relay-314 were reported by a STG group that was stationed on the system. The goal of this outpost was to look for Geth, or AI, signatures in the Voyager Cluster, while the battle group of twenty-five ships provided protection to the personnel on the station.

Illo sighted as he watched Talak, the systems analyst, discuss the lack of activity with Korial, a commando that was stationed here for extra protection.

"I'm telling you Talak, the Geth aren't that stupid to try and enter

this cluster with our presence here," Korial said for the tenth time in the last 3 hours of the discussion.

"And I keep telling you Korial, if that were the case, then why's that the Hierarchy wants us on this station?" Retorted Talak.

"That's because they want to take us out of the loop with that 'Off Limits' system that the Citadel encountered one year ago," Korial explained.

"Maybe you are right, besides, what do you think that they have found over there?" Talak asked.

Before Korial could answer, Illo interrupted both of them, "Don't you two have a system to be monitoring?" he asked rhetorically.

After hearing the General, both, Talak and Korial, returned to their duties. After 10 minutes of inactivity Talak turned to Korial, "So what do you think the Council is hiding in that system?" he asked.

Illo only sighed, it appears that this is what happens when they sent rookies to monitor jobs, 'They don't train soldiers like before any more', Illo thought to himself before getting back to work.

****September 5, 2172, 2330 Hours, Citadel Council Calendar, Voyager Cluster, Orbit around Pheiros, Turian Carrier****_Predator_****, 30 Minutes before Contact.****

Admiral Desolas Arterius observed the silent and dark void of space that surrounded Pheiros. He, like many other Turians before, wondered what secrets this grand void of space hid, but at the same time he didn't want to find out because space was a dangerous place in many different ways. With this thought put to the side he turned to the bridge, noticing the efficiency of the Turian military at work, every crew member in its station working at the best of their abilities, giving an example of discipline and professionalism.

"Admiral," The communications Junior Lieutenant Abrudas called, "Incoming transmission from the patrol group on the system."

"Acknowledged. Junior Lieutenant, patch it through," Replied the Admiral.

"Affirmative Admiral."

Arterius turned to the communications screen, there he saw Captain Roft of the Turian Cruiser Midnight. "Admiral," the Captain greeted.

"Captain, I suppose that you are ready to make your report about your patrol?" Arterius inquired.

"Yes Admiral, the system is dead, we do not detect any kind of sign of activity in our route, we are returning with the rest of the fleet above Pheiros," The Captain reported.

"Understood Captain, but be ready in case that activity silence changes. Admiral out," And with that he cut the connection.

It appears that today was going to be like any other day in the system, or at least that's what Arterius thought until.

"Admiral, incoming transmission from Pheiros outpost," announced Abrudas.

"Copy, patch it through," Arterius said, he just couldn't get 5 minutes of peace without someone reporting in, but if General Illo was contacting him, it was because something serious was happening, he just hoped that it wasn't any kind of problems.

When he looked to the communications screen his hope of nothing bad happening banished, there in the screen was General Illo, a troubled expression on his face. Arterius knew that if something worried Illo then it had to be something big, he knew that from personal experience after fighting alongside him for 5 years.

"Admiral," Illo said in a hurry, "We have lost communications with the Norlic outpost on the Nubian Expanse, we are only receiving static from them."

That got the Admiral's total attention, he knew that the Norlic outpost in the Nubian Expanse was the second most fortified Turian outpost in this side of the Attican Traverse. If the outpost was attacked, then that meant that it was only matter of time before whatever attacked them would come here. 'It appears that this situation can't get any worse,' he thought.

"Admiral!" Lieutenant Diforian, the systems analyst, called, "We have activity at relay-314. According to the scans, it appears that it is being activated from the other side."

'I just had to jinx it, didn't I?' Arterius scolded himself, "General Illo, focus all the systems of Pheiros' outpost in locating FTL entries to the system. If you detect any signature of an FTL drive not authorized on the system contact me immediately, understood?" Arterius ordered.

"Crystal Admiral, General out."

"Lieutenant Diforian, give me a visual of the relay, Junior Lieutenant Abrudas send a message to the fleet, they are to regroup at my position. I want all the ships on Orange Alert," The Admiral ordered with a tone that gave them no opportunity to argue.

"Yes Admiral!" Both Diforian and Abrudas replied before doing as they were told.

The Admiral turned to the tactical display, there he could see his defense fleet around Pheiros in formation, the status of the Pheiros outpost on the planet and the relay-314.

"Lieutenant Diforian, show me the readings of the relay," Ordered Arterius.

"Yes Admiral," Replied the Lieutenant, "Readings on screen three sir."

Arterius looked at the charts of energy emitting's of relay-314 on the screen, the readings were reaching the top of the chart, which meant that something was coming through the relay, "Lieutenant Diforian, zoom in by 150% on the relay, something is coming through it, when it does put it on the main screen."

"Yes sir," Responded the Lieutenant.

"Sir, incoming transmission from the Nubian Expense Cluster, it appears to be a beacon recorded," Junior Lieutenant Abrudas informed.

"Admiral, some kind of Drop Ship made it just trough the relay," Informed Lieutenant Diforian.

"Lieutenant scan that Drop Ship, I want to know everything about it," Ordered Arterius before addressing communications, "Junior Lieutenant Abrudas, play that transmission, hopefully we will know what happened to the Norlic outpost."

"Playing transmission sir."

"_Her-e the comma-a-a-ing officer of the No-lic ou-ost, we have been atta-a-a-acked by Geth forces, the outpost-lost, if anyone read m-e, alert Pheiros outp-st, Geth forces a-e in rout-"_The transmission ended with the sound of an explosion before starting again.

Abrudas cut the transmission before asking, "Admiral, orders?"

Before Arterius could respond, Lieutenant Diforian announced, "Admiral, scans are complete, the presumed drop ship appears to be dead in space. I couldn't detect any kind of active systems except for life support, thermal scans show four life forms inside the ship."

Arterius considered his options, on one hand he could start the evacuation of the Pheiros outpost and then destroy it and return to Turian space to inform of the happenings on the system, negating in the process the chance that the Geth take the outpost, but also leaving the newcomers; that for all he knew, where just leaving their home planet; at the mercy of the Geth ships. On the other hand, his fleet could stay and defend the outpost, while his ship and nine more went to greet and help the newcomers. Thus informing them of Citadel Law concerning the activation of relays, and in the process creating a kill zone between the rest of his fleet and the ships that he would be taking, giving him an advantage over the enemy forces that are coming. This in turn will allow him to show the newcomers, the power of the Turian military and by extension of the Citadel, making them easier to introduce them to the Citadel government and gain a new System. Yes, Arterius liked the second option a lot more than the first.

"Junior Lieutenant Abrudas, send a message to the Frigates _Eyes of the Beast_, _Redemption_, _New Frontier_, _Skyline_, _New Horizon_, and _Sky Hammer_, the Cruisers _Midnight_, _Eye of the Beholder_, and _The Hunter_. They are to accompany my ship to greet the newcomers, also tell the rest of the fleet to be on Red Alert and to stay in their positions, we are going to create a kill zone between the ships

accompanying me and the rest of the fleet," Ordered Arterius.

"Affirmative Admiral, message sent," Replied Abrudas, "The Frigates and Cruisers that are accompanying us are ready to depart sir."

"Good, navigation, take our ships thirty clicks from unknown-1."

"Yes Admiral, following course," Reported the navigations officer.

"Admiral, I'm detecting five new contacts coming through the relay," Lieutenant Diforian reported.

"Put them on screen Lieutenant," Ordered Arterius.

"Sir, visual on the main screen," After Lieutenant Diforian finished speaking, the Admiral looked at the screen and his eyes went wide for several reasons. The main ones being that this newcomers had allies, if the two different designs between those five ships where any indication. Also, the block like ships' owners, which he assumed where of the same species that sent the drop ship through the relay, had, most likely, already expanded to different systems. Finally, all those five ships where designed for one thing, and one thing only, war.

At first Arterius thought that these new comers were a violent race, but just as fast as the thought came, it left. 'If they were a violent race, then it is unlikely that they would have allies that are willing to send their ships to rescue only one Drop Ship,' he thought. "Lieutenant Diforian, scan those ships, navigation keep course to our destination, and Abrudas, sent word to the entire fleet: They are not to fire on these newcomers under any circumstances unless fired upon first," Arterius said seriously.

"Yes sir, initiating scans."

"Continuing course to destination."

"Affirmative Admiral."

All of them replied.

"Admiral, scans are finished, it appears that the smaller ship is at 478m long, followed by the other two blocky ones at 1.3Km long. The other two ships are at," Lieutenant Diforian stopped to check again the diagnostics on his terminal, then he continued nervously, "the other two ships are at, 2.5Km long and 7.8Km long, also, there aren't any traces of element zero on any of the ships Admiral," Finished Diforian.

'By the Spirits, how did they managed to construct such large vessels and without the use of element zero on any of their systems?' Arterius thought.

"Lieutenant, mark those ships, set that 7.8km vessel as Tango-1, weapons officer, ready weapons at 50% and give me firing solutions on

the unknowns, concentrate on Tango 1. If they fire upon us, and only IF they do it first, I want you to return the favor, understood?" Arterius ordered.

"Crystal sir," replied the weapons officer.

'Hopefully we can manage a peaceful contact; we already have enough problems with the Geth fleet coming to us,' Arterius thought. Now he could only hope that his assumptions about the newcomers were correct, if not, he had just doomed his fleet on the system.

****September 6, 2574, 0010 Hours, System Alliance Calendar, Unknown System, CCS-Class Battlecruiser****_Purity of Spirit._****

"Fleet Master," 'Lira said, "Scan of the system is complete, I'm detecting another artifact identical to Tango 1. Also, fifteen unknown contacts are around the second planet closest to the star in the system, and ten unknown contacts are approaching to our position. From the looks of it, they appear to be six Corvettes, three Light Frigates, and one Heavy Frigate to our standards sir," 'Lira informed.

"Put them on screen Lieutenant," Fleet Master Qunu ordered.

"Putting them on screen four Fleet Master."

Qunu nodded and looked at screen four, there he saw the ten unknown ships in formation heading to the position of the rescue team. The ships' designs giving a feeling that they were hawks in the sky waiting for their prey. Qunu knew that ONI would want more information in this new species, especially if they proved to be hostile.

"Lieutenant 'Lira, scan those ships. Lieutenant Roberts, contact the _Fair Weather_," Qunu ordered.

"Scanning ships Fleet Master."

"_Fair Weather_ on the line sir."

Looking at the communications screen, Qunu said, "Captain Stuart, how's the extraction of Delta-309 going?"

"Delta-309 is being dragged by two other Pelicans, it appears that when Tango-1 transported it here, it also fried its systems. The ETA is two minutes to complete the mission Fleet Master," Reported Captain Stuart.

"Fleet Master," Lieutenant 'Lira called, "Scan of the unknown ships is complete," she informed.

In the tactical monitor appeared the representation of the system with the fifteen unknowns around the second planet and the ten unknowns at just 150,000 kilometers of his ships. Both he and Captain Stuart, watched from the communications screen, observing the situation as the holographic image of Raven appeared in the tactical display.

"Sirs, the unknown ships have an emission of energy similar to the

one emanating from Tango-1, it appears to be concentrated around the entire ship changing their molecular mass somehow. Also, their ships are stopping at the 150,000 kilometer mark, and all of their ships have heating signatures coming from their weapons. We are being targeted," Raven informed.

At hearing this, Fleet Master Qunu started giving orders, "Put all ships in Red Alert, charge weapons to 70%, do not fire unless fired upon first. Captain Stuart, be prepared to anything. Construct Raven, send the First Contact Package. Lieutenant Roberts, put Lieutenant Commander Smith on the line."

"First contact Package sent Fleet Master," Replied Raven.

"Lieutenant Commander Smith is on the line sir," Informed Roberts.

"Fleet Master," Captain Stuart acknowledged and then terminated the line.

Qunu turned to the communications screen to address Lieutenant Commander Smith, "Lieutenant Commander, I want you and your crew to board the Stealth Prowler Eagle's Eye and get ready for deployment. Your orders are to observe the happenings on this system and obtain information about this unknowns."

"It will be done Fleet Master," Replied Smith before cutting the line and informing the crew of the assignment.

"Has the unknown fleet answered the package?" Asked Qunu.

"Negative Fleet Master," Replied Raven, "It is possible that they are having problems with our communications systems," Elaborated Raven in a soothing tone.

"I see," Qunu replied, "Lieutenant Roberts, Raven, keep scanning communications."

Both nodded and kept working, now all that he could do was wait for the unknown's movement and then proceed from there.

****September 6, 2574, 0020 Hours, System Alliance Calendar, Unknown system, CCS-Class Battlecruiser***_Purity of Spirit, _****Armory Deck, Infiltration Team GHOST.****

Gunnery Sergeant Francis Tomson was currently in the armory of the Purity of Spirit, suiting up with the rest of GHOST team. The infiltration Team GHOST was one of the best espionage teams that ONI had to offer, it also was one of the most diverse. GHOST team consisted of four team members, with him as the leader of the group and riflemen, then it was Sergeant Yeg, his second in command and the best sniper that he had ever seen, Corporal Reth, the communications specialist, and finally there was Ghost-4 or G-4 as the rest liked to call him, he was the tech expert/hacker of the group and nothing much was known about him (apparently the Alliance hadn't have found the ability to understand his language, but he can understand the rest of us and communicate via a computer in his helmet with the rest of the team.) not even his real name, but you could count on him on this line of work.

They all had been called by Lieutenant Commander Smith, the ranking officer of the Prowler _Eagles' Eye_, five minutes ago, ordering them to suit-up and board the ship for departure. Francis knew that they were on an unexplored system, but that was all the intel that he had at the moment. So, an unexpected deployment in unknown space, which sounded like bad news to him, he just hoped that whatever the assignment was, that it wasn't related to a new war.

September 6, 2172, 0018 Hours, Citadel Council Calendar, Voyager Cluster, 150,000 kilometers from unknown aliens, Turian Carrier**_Predator._**

Once his battle group of ten ships stopped at 150,000Km from the unknowns, Admiral Desolas Arterius watched as the smaller, unknown sized, light cruiser ship retrieved the drop-ship that first arrived in the system. The other two similar drop-ships carrying it to what he presumed was the hangar. He was about to order the Communications Junior Lieutenant to send the First Contact Package when.

"Admiral, I'm detecting heat signatures from the unknown battle group!" Reported Lieutenant Diforian.

Arterius thought that all hope for a peaceful contact was over, and was about to order to fire on the hostile ships when.

"Admiral, I'm receiving some kind of package message from the unknowns," Reported Junior Lieutenant Abrudas, "Do you want me to play it?"

"Do it. If my assumptions are correct, then it is their First Contact Package," Replied the Admiral.

"Then why would they charge their weapons before sending the message?" asked Diforian.

"Precaution, maybe they detected our weapons signatures and thought that we were going to attack them," Replied the Admiral.

"Makes sense," Diforian said.

"Junior Lieutenant, what does the package contains?" Asked the Admiral.

"Don't know sir, I'm still trying to make it compatible with our systems," Replied Abrudas, "Hmm, that's weird," Abrudas thought out loud.

"What is it Junior Lieutenant?" Asked the Admiral.

"It appears that the Package has some level of intelligence, it is rewriting itself to be compatible with our systems," Replied Abrudas with a tone of excitement and surprise.

"Rewriting itself?" Wondered Arterius. He knew that no communication's package was capable of doing that, the only options were that their communications officer was doing it from their ship, but that was unlikely because they didn't have the schematics of the communications systems used by the Citadel, or that an AI was doing the necessary modifications. That's when realization hit him:

AI.

"Junior Lieutenant Abrudas, it's the package only rewriting itself?" asked the Admiral, with some insecurity in his normally calm voice.

"Affirmative Admiral, it's just doing that. Why do you ask?" asked Abrudas with confusion on his voice.

"Because, I think that an AI is doing that," Replied the Admiral while watching the shocked and worried expressions of the crew on the bridge.

"Do you want me to fire the ship that it's sending the signal sir?" Asked the weapons officer.

Arterius thought the situation for a second before answering, "Negative, these newcomers aren't informed of Citadel Law, thus we can't expect them to follow the law until they are informed of it," Arterius replied. "Junior Lieutenant Abrudas, keep a close eye on the activities of that AI, if it tries to access other information irrelevant to the rewriting of the package cut the signal."

"Understood Admiral," Replied Abrudas.

Some seconds later, which appeared like hours to Arterius, the package finished its rewriting.

"Admiral the Package is asking me for permission to download our language, and also to load theirs in our systems, do you want me to give it permission?" Asked Abrudas.

"Affirmative Junior Lieutenant," Conceded Arterius after thinking about it for a second.

"Download and load of languages completed. Playing message on screen one sir," Replied Abrudas.

"Junior Lieutenant send our First Contact Package to the unknowns, that way they know that we have intentions of a peaceful first contact," Ordered the Admiral while watching the screen.

It appeared that the species names of this unknowns were, Human, a bipedal race that resembled an Asari, only that this Humans were a bi-gender species instead of mono-gender, their skin pigmentation ranged from clearer tones to darker ones, and also they had fur on the top of their heads instead of cartilage based scalp crests. The Sangheili was the next species shown, a reptilian like race that its culture was very similar to the Turian one. There were also the Unggoy, a species that resembled in some aspects the Volus, and there were other three more species, the Kig-yar, an avian like race, the Yanme'e, a very intelligent insect like race, and the Huragok, a species that resembled the Hanar. The package also contained the name of their government; The Systems Alliance; their cultures, pictures of different worlds, families, and information of some of their history, as individual species, and also of the Systems Alliance formation.

"Junior Lieutenant Abrudas contact the bigger ship of the Systems

Alliance," Arterius said, with a strange feeling in his throat at pronouncing 'Systems Alliance'.

"Yes Admiral sending the signal now," Abrudas said.

It all depended on Arterius now to make this contact a successful one before the Geth ships arrived.

September 6, 2574, 0035 Hours, System Alliance Calendar, Unknown system, CCS-Class Battlecruiser**_Purity of Spirit._**

After Fleet master Qunu, like the rest of the crew, finished watching the First Contact Package sent by the now identified Turian ships, he wondered what would be the ramifications that would follow after meeting with this 'Citadel Council'.

"Fleet Master incoming transmission from the Turian Heavy Frigate," Announced Abrudas.

"Patch it through, also put on the line Shipmaster Orna and Captain Stuart," Ordered Qunu.

"Yes Fleet Master patching transmission to screen one. Shipmaster Orna and Captain Stuart are on the line sir," Replied Abrudas before the face of a Turian appeared in a third of the screen, the other part of the screen being shared by Shipmaster Orna and Captain Stuart.

"Greetings, I'm Admiral Desolas Arterius of the Military Turian Hierarchy, commanding officer of the Defense Fleet stationed at Pheiros outpost, aboard the Turian Carrier Predator," Arterius greeted, not missing the surprised expressions of the three individuals in the screen at the mention of the carrier. But as fast as the surprise came to the three Alliance members it left them, being replaced by one of professionalism.

"Admiral Desolas Arterius, greetings, I'm Fleet Master or Admiral Qunu of the Systems Alliance, aboard the CCS-Class Battlecruiser _Purity of Spirit_, and I'm the commanding officer of this rescue operation," Qunu presented himself before letting the other two officers do the same.

"I'm Shipmaster or Captain Orna 'Fulsamee aboard the CPV-Class Heavy Destroyer _Esteem_, " Spoke Orna.

"And I'm Captain Frederick Stuart aboard the UNSC Stalwart Light Frigate _Fair Weather_, " Captain Stuart finished.

The three of them now saw the expression of shock in Admiral Arterius's face after hearing their designation classes for ships as they were lit by a green light in the tactical display aboard the Carrier _Predator_, it was obvious for them that the Admiral had never seen vessels of such big dimensions as the _Purity of Spirit_; but like them, the Admiral was fast in composing himself before saying.

"Admiral, Captains, am I correct in assuming that one of your ships has an active AI?" Arterius asked with caution on his voice.

"Yes Admiral, it would be aboard my ship. Is there a particular

reason that you ask?" Answered Captain Stuart with a tone of seriousness.

"Actually, there is," Arterius said, "You are now on Citadel controlled space and there are two laws that your ships have broken today. One is the activation of relays, that is the name of the artifact that your ships came through, without authorization from the Council. The other one is the use of AIs, which it is prohibited in all Citadel Space. Now, I know that your government had no idea that such laws and the Council existed, so take this as an introduction to some of our laws for future encounters between our governments," Arterius informed them while they were discussing the possible consequences of this for them after the mention of AIs. "By regulation I'm to take you to the Council to establish a meeting between our governments, but your arrival was during a bad timing right now. I'll arrange a meeting with the Council on the Citadel in one standard week, also for this time, bring one of your AIs to the Citadel so you can explain better the situation regarding them, I'll make sure that you have the permissions required to do so," The Admiral informed them.

"Any particular reason that AIs are illegal in Citadel Space? And why is it that we arrived at a bad time Admiral?" Asked Captain Stuart, glad that the Admiral wasn't going to be irrational and shot them for breaking two laws without even knowing that they existed on this region of space.

Admiral Arterius considered if telling them about the incoming Geth fleet was a good idea. In the end he decided to do it, 'Maybe if I can get their help we could salvage more lives in this incoming battle,' he thought.

"Admiral, Captains, if you stay long enough, you will see the reason why AIs are banned on Citadel Space, because, as of right now, a Geth fleet is coming to this Cluster to attack us," Arterius explained to them.

"Geth fleet? How is it related to the prohibition of constructs?" Asked Qunu.

"The Geth are AIs that attack organics on sight, they," Whatever else that it was that Arterius was going to tell them was interrupted when the three of them watched as he turned to talk to someone off the screen. When he turned back, Arterius had a worried expression, "The Geth Fleet has been detected, they will arrive on the system in five minutes," He told them.

The Fleet Master, Shipmaster and Captain looked at each other and agreed to a silent decision, "Admiral if it is possible, we will aid your fleet against this Geth," 'And in the process we get our window to deploy the _Eagle's Eye_ without detection and also gaining some trust of the Council to shake them off our backs for a period of time,' thought Qunu.

Arterius nodded before he replied, "That would be appreciated, once the Geth fleet enters the system we will attack them from both sides," Informed Arterius.

"That'll work, but before that, one of our ships will detonate an EMP bomb on the Geth fleet, that would give us another advantage over

them," Qunu said while also giving the order to the _Eagle's Eye_ to deploy while the rest of the ships focused their long range scanners in the insertion point of the Geth fleet into the system. Then he disconnected the line and started giving orders to his ships.

The Turian Ships didn't notice the deployment and activation of the Stealth Systems of the _Eagle's Eye_, making it invisible to them.

"Captain Stuart, I want your ship to get back to the Deca-5 system and inform command of what we discovered. Also, tell the rest of the Fast Response Fleet, that if we don't report in three hours, they are to come through the relay and investigate what happened," Qunu ordered.

"Yes sir, setting course to the relay, Stuart out."

"Junior Lieutenant, contact the rest of the ships, they are to form upon my ship and fire MACs, Plasma Torpedoes and Archer Missiles to the enemy once the EMP detonates. Also, inform Admiral Arterius to not get past the mark of 200,000 km from the enemy fleet until the EMP detonates," Ordered Qunu.

"Yes Fleet Master," Replied Abrudas, "messages sent."

Now it was matter of time before the battle commenced.

****September 6, 2172, 0110 Hours, Citadel Council Calendar, Voyager Cluster, Pheiros outpost.****

"Hmm that's weird," Commented Talak, the systems expert on the Pheiros outpost.

"What's weird?" asked General Illo.

"The scans detected a new contact signature on the radar, but just as it appeared it was gone," Informed Talak.

"Maybe it was some kind of fighter deployed by the Alliance?" asked commando Korial.

"Doubtful, the signature matched a bigger object," Replied Talak.

"It could be a glitch on the system?" Supplied Illo.

"Yea, maybe it was that," conceded Talak. "General, I'm detecting multiple FTL entries on the system, signatures match those of the Geth," Talak informed.

"Inform the fleet, tell them that we are going radio silent to decrease detection probabilities," Ordered Illo.

"Affirmative General, message sent," Informed Talak.

****September 6, 2574, 0120 Hours, System Alliance Calendar, Unknown System, ONI Stealth Prowler****_Eagle's Eye._****

Lieutenant Commander Smith watched the now identified Geth Fleet arrive at the system, he was impressed by the fleet of ninety ships

that they had sent, whatever it was that they wanted, they wanted it badly.

Like all the members of ONI, he knew that information was power, but he also acted in the shadows to get all the details. His current objectives were to deploy an EMP bomb in the Geth fleet, observe the battle; specially the capabilities demonstrated by both, the Turian and Geth ships, and to stay on the system to observe and download all the information inside that planetary outpost for further analysis.

"Lieutenant Darius, launch the EMP Missile and detonate ninety seconds after launch," Ordered Smith.

"EMP Missile on the way," Informed Darius, "Detonation in T-minus eighty seconds."

"Junior Lieutenant Noles, once that EMP detonates, set course to the second planet, I want you to station us at thirty km from that base in the surface."

"Yes sir," Replied Noles.

"Sir, detonation of EMP in forty seconds," The AI Raven replied. While communications between the Alliance and the Turians was happening, Raven transferred its systems aboard the _Eagle's Eye_ to assist in their mission.

"Noted Raven," responded Smith.

Forty seconds later, the EMP detonated and the _Eagle's Eye_ started its course towards the second planet on the system.

September 6, 2172, 0122 Hours, Citadel Council Calendar, Voyager Cluster, Turian Carrier**_Predator._**

Admiral Desolas Arterius watched as half of the Geth fleet suddenly stopped advancing after some kind of pulse of energy was sighted in the center of the fleet, 'I guess that's that EMP bomb the Systems Alliance mentioned.'

"All ships, open fire. I want the Cruisers and Dreadnought to concentrate fire on the still operational Geth ships, the rest of the fleet is to concentrate on the disabled vessels," He ordered. "Commander Kandros, deploy all fighters aboard the ship. Also, if any Geth ship gets in range, put a hole through it with the Accelerator Cannon," Arterius said to his weapons officer.

"Affirmative Admiral, fighters are being deployed," Answered Kandros.

"Lieutenant Diforian, show me the battle on the tactical screen."

"Tactical screen updated Admiral," replied Diforian.

Arterius watched the ongoing battle from his tactical screen, the Geth ships were divided in two groups, one consisting of thirty ships attacking both ambush positions that his fleet had assumed. Meanwhile, the other twenty were concentrating on the Systems

Alliance's ships. Finally, the remaining forty Geth ships laid in the void of space totally annihilated after the first volley of missiles that his fleet and the four remaining ships of the Systems Alliance launched.

The Admiral watched as his fleet engaged the enemy, having already sustained eight losses, including the Frigate Sky Hammer, and the Cruiser Midnight. The Geth ships weren't fairing any better, while Geth ships had more efficient defensive systems and offensive capabilities compared to the Turian ships, they lacked the imagination to pull off strategies that, most of the times, they weren't expecting; thus why the Geth had already lost ten of their ships. The admiral sensed something off about the way this battle was going, 'It's almost as if they were testing our capabilities, but with what purpose? They already know what the Turian fleets are capable of, unlessâ€¦' thought Arterius before realization hit him, 'They aren't here to take the outpost on Pheiros, no, they knew that we have made contact with a new species, so they sent this fleet to test their capabilities. The question is how? How did they found out so quickly about this?' Arterius thought before looking back at the tactical screen, but this time concentrating on the Systems Alliance's engage. What he saw surprised him, while some of his frigates were assisting the Alliance, the Alliance's ships were still taking most of the barrage of weapons fired at them, and their shields appeared to be holding that quantity of firepower, with just some minor fluctuations here and there. 'Good thing that we didn't engaged them on combat,' Arterius thought, he didn't want to find out what would have happened when the Geth fleet arrived, if his ships had engaged the Alliance.

****September 6, 2574, 0140 Hours, System Alliance Calendar, Unknown system, CCS-Class Battlecruiser****_Purity of Spirit._****

'There's something off about this,' Thought Fleet Master Qunu, 'It's almost as if this Geth weren't giving everything they have on this engagement, it's almost as if they are testing us.'

Many years of experience on combat space have given him the 'ability' to sense when something is off in combat, it's almost as if he could see the symptoms of the engagement.

"Lieutenant 'Lira, what's the status of our ships?" Qunu asked.

"Fleet Master, the Destroyer Iroquois has lost her shields and has several deck breaches on its hull, the Destroyer Armageddon's Edge is low on Missiles and its reactor can now only sustain one MAC cannon and 40% power to its shields. The Heavy Destroyer Esteem has suffered damage to its reactor after several enemy missiles impacted on the decks close to it, and its low on ammunition for Missiles. Our ship has shields at 57% strength, we have reports of hull breaches on Decks 5-7 and 13-16, and we are low on Archers," Reported 'Lira.

"Lieutenant Robert, inform the Destroyer Iroquois to pull back behind the Purity of Spirit, and that it prepares what it has left of Archer Missiles for launching at my word. Also, send a message to the Armageddon's Edge, tell them that they are to regroup with the Esteem and coordinate their MAC fire with theirs," Ordered Qunu, "Weapons officer, prepare to fire all plasma batteries at my

signal."

"Yes sir," Both Robert and the weapons officer said.

"Someone, contact the Turian Frigate _New Horizon_," Ordered Qunu.

"Message sent to the ships. Fleet Master, the _New Horizon_ is on line," Reported Robert.

Qunu nodded and turned to the screen, "Captain, what's the status of your ship?" asked Qunu.

"The _New Horizon_ can still fight Fleet Master," Reported the Turian Captain, "we have the THANIX cannon offline, and we still have a good amount of Disruptor Missiles."

"I see. Captain, I want you to ready as many Missiles as you can to fire at my word, we are finishing this engagement now," Informed the Fleet Master.

The Turian Captain had a moment of indecision, not sure if he should follow his orders, but in the end he nodded and disconnected the line.

Qunu turned back to Lieutenant Robert, "Lieutenant Robert, send word to the _Esteem_, tell them to fire all the plasma batteries at the enemy, also fire ours now," Ordered Qunu, no sooner he finished the order and he saw one-hundred and sixty plasma torpedoes in route to the enemy. "Contact the destroyers and the _New Horizon_, tell them to fire now their missiles."

What followed next for the already weakened twelve Geth ships, was a demonstration of total armageddon to their ships.

"Lieutenant 'Lira report."

"Fleet Master, enemy ships on the system are reported destroyed or in retreat, also we lost the _Iroquois_, it appears that the power used to fire all the Archers, plus the weakened state of the ship, managed to overheat the reactor, making it explode. The _Armageddon's Edge_ and the _Esteem_ report heavy damage. It also appears that the Turian Fleet sustained eighteen ship losses, and the rest of their ships are severely damaged for the most part," Reported 'Lira.

"Sir incoming transmission from the _Predator_," Announced Robert.

"Put it on screen Lieutenant," Qunu answered.

"Fleet Master, that the spirits accompany the brave man and woman that we lost in this battle," Greeted Admiral Arterius.

"And that they find peace in the next great adventure that awaits them Admiral," Qunu finished.

Both then shared a moment of silence to mourn the souls lost on this day, then, "Fleet Master, I thank you for your assistance against the Geth, I fear that without your aid we would have had sustained more losses or lost the entire system," Arterius said.

"It was no problem Admiral, now if you excuse me, me and my ships will take our leave and come back in a week to meet with your council," Informed Qunu.

"Understood Fleet Master, Arterius out."

Once the transmission was cut, Qunu and his ships took leave towards what was now identified as a relay to get back to the Alliance.

September 6, 2172, 0210 Hours, Citadel Council Calendar, Voyager Cluster, Turian Carrier**_Predator._**

"Junior Lieutenant Abrudas, send a message to Pheiros outpost, tell them to send all the information on what happened here to the Hierarchy and the Council," Arterius ordered.

"Yes Admiral," Replied Abrudas.

Now it was time to wait and see if this System Alliance becommmed and ally of the Council or an enemy, but he wouldn't worry about that now, he still had a system to protect until reinforcements arrived.

September 6, 2574, 0210 Hours, System Alliance Calendar, Deca-5 system.

When the 3 remaining ships arrived back to Alliance Space through the relay, they immediately sent a report of their findings and what happened to High Command, while their ships went to Phoenix to resupply and repair their ships.

September 6, 2574, 0300 Hours, System Alliance Calendar,*Reincarnation System, Arcturus Station.**

In the hearth of the Systems Alliance was Arcturus Station, home to approximately 100,000,000 civilians of all species, and also the political and military power of the Alliance. The station, which was guarded by the 5th, 12th and 18th Fleets, one-hundred Orbital Defense Platforms, and three shield generators that where strictly for Arcturus Station, was the most guarder fortress in all Alliance Space.

Today the station was swarmed with activity; to anyone it would appear another regular day for the station, but only a selected few knew that a meeting, with the most powerful members of the Alliance, was occurring on the upper levels of the station.

This members were, Lord Admiral Terrance Hood, the leader of all Naval Forces of the Alliance, Arbiter Thel Vadam, the leader of all Ground Forces on the Alliance and leader of the Sangheili people, Jason Patterson, the leader of ONI, the President of the Alliance Jonatan Vasquez, and the Vice-President Uptar.

All of them were currently discussing the events that transpired at the relay, "This information is surely disturbing and problematic," The President commented, "Imagine the panic that this could cause to the civilian population. Once they know that there is a galactic government out there, and also that there are machines trying to kill

all organic life."

"And that's why we won't tell anything of this to the civilians," Informed Patterson.

"Not inform them, they have the right to know about what is out there, besides, we can't hide this forever even if we tried," The Vice-President argued.

"Mr. President, Vice-President, we have to hide this until we meet with this Citadel Council, then after that we will know what to tell to the civilians," Lord Hood said.

"I agree with Lord Admiral Hood and with ONI on this, if we tell the civilians what we know now, we could cause more harm than good," Thel commented.

The President sighted, "Okayâ€| but this still leave us with the problem that we know nothing about this Council, besides that they hate AIs and that activating relays is illegal."

"And that's where we come in," The Leader of ONI said, "Before Fleet Master Qunu came back to the Deca-5 System, he deployed the Prowler _Eagle's Eye _on the unknown system. Lieutenant Commander Smith is at command of the prowler and he sent us vital information on the Turian and Geth combat capabilities. While their MACs are weaker than ours, their firing rate and velocity of the round compensates that, also their missiles appear to weaken a lot faster our shields; right now I have put scientists to investigate that. It also appears that the Turian and Geth ships have shields that are designed to resist a lot of punishment from kinetic weapons, at a level that the destroyers needed two MAC rounds to destroy a sized Frigate ship while the Battlecruiser only needed one, but their shields are vulnerable to energy and plasma weaponry," He informed.

"And where is currently the _Eagle's Eye_?" asked Hood.

"Thirty kilometers to the north of the base on the Planet that was being protected by the Turian Fleet," The leader of ONI informed.

"Knowing you, I assume that they already have their orders?" Thel inquired while Hood and Jonatan looked at each other knowingly of the ways of ONI.

"Affirmative Arbiter, they are to infiltrate the base without detection and download as much information as they can from the server. Right now the Commander is awaiting the green light to inform GHOST team of the mission," Jason informed.

"Go ahead with the mission, we need as much information on this Citadel as we can get in order to have the advantage on this new playing field," Hood said.

All the rest of the present members nodded their agreement to this. If they were going into the shadows, ONI would make sure to be their light in there.

September 6, 2172, 0300 Hours, Citadel Council Calendar, Widow System, Citadel Presidium, Council Chambers.

On the hearth of Citadel Space, was the Citadel Station itself, with a population that numbered on the tens of millions, and the largest fleet on all Citadel Space guarding it. On this very moment the three more influential and powerful beings of Citadel Space were having a meeting, they were the three councilors Sparatus, Valern, and Tevos.

Currently they were discussing the events that transpired at Relay-314 after receiving the information from Admiral Desolas Arterius.

"This finding is interesting, to think that six new species are all living under a single banner. This could potentially improve the Citadel government, especially its technology." Councilor Valern said, excited by the technological display that they had seen so far of those four ships recorded on the video showed to them.

"That is assuming that they don't decide to attack us. With ships of those sizes and that powerful; that apparently they dreadnoughts are bigger and with more fire power, if this information is to be believed; they could represent the biggest threat to the Citadel since the Rachni discovered the relays," Sparatus declared.

"I don't see any reason that would suggest that this Systems Alliance wants to take aggressive actions towards us Sparatus, after all, they did help in the defense of Pheiros from the Geth attack," Tevos said with a tone of calmness and wisdom on her voice.

"Maybe you are right Tevos, but what if they decide to attack us? Or if they only helped us to gain information on our combat capabilities, so they can prepare once they invade?" Sparatus asked, showing his military mind on the matter.

"While Sparatus' worries are reasonable; his assumptions could be right. We should prepare should the worst happen," Valern said.

Tevos only sighted, not because her fellow counselors couldn't see the peaceful way to solve this, no, she sighted because she knew that they were correct on making those assumptions. With what they had seen, they could tell that, while powerful, that labeled Battlecruiser of 7.8 km didn't show its 100% capabilities, 'Who knows what they are capable of,' Tevos thought. "Okay, we will take the necessary precautions on this situation. What do you suggest?" She asked.

"Deploy some STG's stealth vessels on the other side of the relay. Suggest sending them via conventional FTL capabilities, that'll decrease the detection risk," Valern said. "Also, we need to give more funds to Research and Devolvment programs. Design counter measures to some of their capabilities and improve ours."

"I agree with this, if the talks go peacefully and we integrate the Systems Alliance to the Citadel, it will be enough. If not well, then we will have to considerate other options," Sparatus said.

"Okay, now that this issue is settled, how are the progress going on Project Big Ring?" Tevos asked.

"STGs and SPECTRES report some complications lately on the artifact. It appears that the defense mechanisms are harder to bypass as we open more of the installations there," Valern said while reading the report.

Both councilors nodded at that, and then left to do their respective duties.

September 6, 2574, 0410 Hours, System Alliance Calendar, Now identified Voyager Cluster, ONI Stealth Prowler**_Eagles Eye._**

Lieutenant Commander Smith watched the topography map of the location of the base on the planet when the Raven interrupted him.

"Sir, incoming transmission from High Command," Raven reported.

"Patch it through," Said Smith.

When he turned to the screen, he immediately put himself in full attention. On the screen was none other than the leader of ONI.

"Lieutenant Commander Smith, you have the Green light, proceed with the mission," Then he cut the transmission.

Smith just watched for a bit longer before turning to Raven.

"Raven, call GHOST team to the bridge," Smith ordered.

Updated: 10/16/15

A/N: And here we are the second chapter of the story. Now I want to thank the people that reviewed this story so far, your suggestions actually helped me identify a LOT of errors on the first chapter, and correct ones on this chapter. Now on the space battle, I know I didn't make it all epic but I just wanted to make both the Citadel and the Alliance aware of some capabilities that their counterparts have. Okay then now until next chapter. See you and Review!

3. BlackOps, Ring Facilities,& Preparations

The Next Great Journey

A/N: First I want to thank all the readers that reviewed this story, I really appreciate the comments. Now onto the next chapter of this story.

Speaking

'**Thoughts**'

[Radio Communications]

Disclaimer: I don't own Halo or Mass Effect both belong to their perspective owners.

Chapter 3: Black Ops, Ring Facilities, and Preparations

****September 6, 2574, 0415 Hours, System Alliance Calendar, Now identified Voyager Cluster, Pheiros, ONI Stealth Prowler **_**Eagles Eye.**_**

Gunnery Sergeant Francis Tomson, leader of the infiltration and espionage team, codename GHOST, was walking towards the bridge of the prowler with the rest of GHOST team; Sergeant Yeg, Corporal Reth, and G-4. All of them were in the armory, cleaning and giving maintenance to their weapons and armor, when they got a call from the commanding officer of the ship, and then they set up pace to the bridge.

"Hey Yeg," Francis called, "what do you think this next mission is about?" he asked.

"Probably we have to infiltrate some ship of those Turians, or secure whatever it was that their fleet were defending." Yeg commented, not caring too much of what the assignment was.

"Probably" Francis said, 'Makes you wonder when this galaxy would have peace between its people.' he thought before arriving at the bridge.

"Lieutenant Commander" he and the rest of the team saluted.

"At ease GHOST team." Responded Smith, "Now onto more pressing matters. ONI and High Command had just giving us the green light to proceed with our real mission on this system." he informed.

"Real mission Commander?" Francis asked what everyone on the team had on their minds.

"Yes Sergeant, our real mission here is to, infiltrate and download all the information that is on that planetary base." Smith informed, "High Command has given us a window of 2 days to complete this mission, if we do not complete it by then, then this operation will be a failure, understood?" he asked.

"Yes Sir!" GHOST team responded.

"Good, now preliminary scans and topography images show, that the primary entrance of the base is in the south side. It is surrounded by a forest that extends to the west and east sides of the perimeter of the base, also it is heavily fortified, at least there is 3 checkpoints on the 3 sides before getting to the entrance. The perimeter has patrols, multiple sniper positions, and it is possible that it has traps and sensors all around." Smith informed.

"Hmm too fortified to try a front approach with the limiting time that we have. Sir, what can you tell me of the north side?" Francis said.

"Raven" Smith called.

"The north side of the base is surrounded by the cliff of the cannon that the base is in, also there are multiple sensor stations guarding it from air insertions." Raven informed.

"What's the maximum range of those sensors?" Yeg asked, having a

thoughtful expression.

"1.5 Km from the cliff." Raven answered.

"Sergeant, what have you in mind?" Smith asked, as he observed him.

"If we can land outside their sensors range, and move towards them to plant charges and destroy them, we could enter the base by the east or west side, while their attention is diverted." Yeg suggested, "The Turians will probably think that Geth that managed to land on the planet were responsible for the attack, and they will focus their remaining sensors to look for synthetic signatures, instead of organic ones"

"That could work" Francis said, "but if we are going to make them believe that the Geth attacked them, we can't engage them with our weapons, that would give them suspicious that there's someone else on the planet, and that could lead them to our discovery." He explained.

"Then we use their weapons instead of ours" Reth informed, "we would just need to find an armory in there and take some." He suggested.

"Too risky, we could be detected, or they could fortify even more the base if we don't find one soon." Francis said.

Smith listened to the ideas spoken, he tried to not interfere on their thinking because frankly, he didn't have a better idea. At the same time, Raven was trying to get better scans of the base, to try and find another possibility, but something was blocking the scans.

While all this happened G-4 sent a message to Raven via the computer that he had on him.

"It appears that G-4 has a suggestion that could work" Raven informed, while everyone else looked at him to elaborate.

Raven took a moment to get the complete message of G-4, then said, "G-4 suggest that instead of blowing up the sensors, we could hack them and make them blind to our presence, so we can get close to the base in a phantom drop ship."

"That will work. Not only we evade detection of the ground patrols, while trying to get to the entrance, but we also get more time to complete this operation." Francis said, "Good thinking G-4."

G-4 only nodded at that, then Francis said, "Okay once we are close to the base, what can we expect Raven?" he asked.

"I can't tell, there's some type of jammer blocking the more precise scans. You'll have to deactivate it before I can make more precise scans of the layout of the base. Also I have already triangulated the position of the jammer, it is 3 Km east of the base. " Raven informed.

"Then we will deactivate it, if we don't know where to look for the server on the base, it could mean failure and detection before we

find it." Francis said.

"In that case Gunnery Sergeant, focus on getting that jammer down, I don't care how, but it has to go if we want to succeed on this mission." Smith said.

"Yes sir, I'll send Yeg and G-4 to the jammer, while Reth and I recon the area of the scanners and hack them. That way we can get our scanners and communications working. Once we complete both task we infiltrate the base." Francis said.

"Understood Sergeant, prepare your team. Dismissed." Smith said.

GHOST team saluted before turning to go to the armory and prepare for their mission.

**202,574, 0400 Hours, Forerunner Calendar, Labeled
****Beta-Prometheus System by the Citadel Council, Installation
06**_**.**_

216-Redeemer, the oracle of installation 06, watched as the Citadel forces tried to open another one of the various facilities on the ring. It had been 1 year since they had discovered this installation. At first, Redeemer had initiated a total lockdown on the installation, before sending stealth sentinels to observe the newcomers.

During one of the deployments of forces of the newcomers, one of his sentinels managed to get inside the transport and download all the information about them. What he found interested and disappointed him, apparently this Citadel Council was a body government that controlled approximately 1% of the entire galaxy, with, literally, too many holes between their controlled systems. The cause of this was because, apparently, their ability to travel from system to system depended on this relay network; at a level that, all of their technology, was based on them.

He was getting annoyed at the intents of the Citadel to open all of the facilities. Apparently they hadn't understood the message that, what is inside on those facilities wasn't for them to use and study; that was a right deserved only for the reclaimers. But this Citadel was dense, it appears that the tight lockdown of each facility, and the sentinels sent to defend them hadn't make that clear to them, yet.

[Oracle, invading forces are trying to open containment facility 0678B on sector 7, how do you want us to proceed?], One of the stealth sentinels told him via radio contact.

[Keep observing them, I will send Major and Enforcer class sentinels to deal with them.] Redeemer said. 'Hopefully this will force them leave that containment facility' he thought.

If the Citadel forces managed to open that containment facility, they would unleash a terror not seen since the end of the Forerunner-Flood war.

**September 6, 2172, 0400 Hours, Citadel Council Calendar,
****Beta-Prometheus System, Big Ring.**

SPECTRE agent, Saren Arterius and a security team of 6 commandos, and 3 STG members, watched as the science, archeologist, and tech teams studied and tried to open the newly found facility on the Big Ring.

He had been stationed on this ring for 7 months, and what he had seen during his time on this artificial garden world had astonished him. New life forms founded on here, and structures that rivaled that of the Prothean's on designs, to name a few.

But he had also witnessed the defenses of this world, the guardians, as were labeled by the Citadel forces on the ring, were the major concern to him and the rest of the security teams.

Not only were their shields immune to most of the weaponry used by the Citadel forces, but also their offensive capabilities could destroy their kinetic barriers in 2 to 3 single shots. At first, the security teams were incapable of defeating them, but after some encounters, they had figured out that overload and disruptor ammo, as weapons with high kinetic forces, could deal with them.

What he also did find somewhat scary in a sense, was the feeling of being observed all the time. He could swear that he had seen some minimal distortions on his surroundings for short amounts of time. But the feeling that he was getting from this facility was nothing like the one of being observed. He could sense some type of danger and evil coming from inside it, but he wasn't totally sure about it, 'I think I'm becoming paranoid.' He thought.

"Professor, how's the hacking going?" he asked to one of the Asari members of the tech team.

"The encryption of the lock is too tight, and is running in a binary system, enlaced withâ€¦"

"Save me the tech talk professor, all I want to know is how long it will take to open this doors." Saren interrupted.

"Right, at this pace I estimate that it would take us at least another hour to break the locks" She informed.

Saren just nodded before turning to keep watching his surroundings.

"Sir, I'm detecting multiple signatures on the radar approaching to our position." An STG systems officer informed him.

'They probably are the security Guardians of this facility.' Saren thought, "First Lieutenant, evacuate all the investigation teams off of the area, we have company." He ordered to the leader of the Asari commandos.

"Yes sir." She said.

"Systems officer, what's the distance of the contacts?" Saren asked.

"40 m and approaching. They'll be in visual range in 50 seconds at current velocity." He said.

He nodded before activating his communications radio, [Security team, take cover behind the trees on the north side, we have contacts coming towards us. Be ready to engage them at my word.] Saren ordered.

Everyone on the security team acknowledged, and took cover positions on the trees and rocks on the north side of the facility. Saren was behind some fallen trees, looking through the scope of his Phaeston assault rifle. Then his radar sensor picked contacts at 20 m coming through the west side. He turned and aimed with his rifle, ready to shoot whatever it was that was coming, but he stopped once he saw what had come. It was bigger than the Guardians that he had seen so far, it had 2 visible shields covering its top and bottom halves, and looked heavily armed.

[All security members, activate disruptor ammo capabilities and have overload ready for deploy. I want that everyone launch overload to the bigger Guardian, once its shields are down concentrate fire on it, in the meantime concentrate on taking down the Guardians.] Saren ordered.

[Yes sir.], everyone acknowledged.

And with that Saren watched as 7 overloads hit the bigger Guardian, and saw that its shields managed to withstand the energy impacts. 'This will be harder than expected.' he thought while taking aim to one of the Guardians and opening fire with the rest of the commandos and STGs members.

Saren managed to destroy 3 more Guardians before a second wave of overloads hit the shields of the bigger Guardian, that had managed to kill 2 commandos so far, but this time its shields failed and he and the remaining security team members concentrated their fire on it. The Guardian couldn't withstand too much fire damage to its structure, and after some seconds it was destroyed. But before Saren and the security team could celebrate their small victory, 3 more of those big Guardians appeared, killing 1 more commando and 2 STGs instantly with their missiles projectiles.

With only 1 commando and 1 STG left, Saren said, [Retreat, we can't win this battle, I'll cover the both of you.]

[Are you sure sir?] The STG said.

[Affirmative, I'll catch up with you 2 on the camp site.] Saren said.

Both the Asari and Salarian looked at each other and then to Saren, both nodded and prepared to run towards the camping site.

Saren took a deep breath and inserted another fresh thermal clip on his assault rifle, [Now run and don't stop until you get to the camp site.] he ordered, before getting out of cover to fire at the big Guardian, managing to get his attention.

Saren watched as the Commando and STG members took off, once he was sure that they were out of range of the Guardians, he tossed a grenade close to the Guardians before taking off towards the camp site.

He heard as the grenade exploded while he was running, taking a few looks behind him to evict getting shoot at. He saw some Guardians persecuting him, he took cover behind a tree before looking out and shooting at them, destroying 2 before taking cover again. Inserting his last thermal clip on his Phaeston rifle, he got out of cover again, destroying another Guarding before continuing running. He didn't saw the incoming missile projectile until it was too late to take cover.

He saw as the missile impacted in front of him, deactivating his kinetic barriers, and sending him flying back, because of the force of the explosion. He landed on a tree before stumbling down towards the floor, and then unconsciousness took him.

September 6, 2574, 0450 Hours, System Alliance Calendar, Voyager Cluster, Pheiros, ONI Stealth Prowler **_Eagles Eye**_**, Armory deck**_**._**_

GHOST team was currently on the armory, preparing their weapons and armor to start the mission. Francis's armor looked like a regular ODS armor, except that his, had camouflage capabilities, and was designed to be undetectable by scan and radar units. Yeg and Reth's armors were a Ranger variant armor, both, like Francis's armor, was designated to be undetectable and with a camouflage unit. G-4 used a silver armor, that it was light to evict obstructing his fling capabilities, and like the other two armors, had camouflage and was undetectable.

The disadvantage of having the camouflage unit in their armors was that, after a period of time it tended to overheat and shut itself down. Thus that was the reason why any of them didn't use it much during missions, and when they did it, they only activated it by shorts amounts of time.

Francis was packing an MA-37 Assault Rifle, an M6G Silenced Magnum, 2 Plasma grenades, his combat knife, and binoculars. Yeg decided to take a Beam rifle, a T31 R-Needle Rifle, and 2 combat knives. Reth was taking a T51 DER/1-Plasma Repeater, a T25 DEP-Plasma Pistol, and his combat knife. G-4 decided to take a T33 GML-Needler, a T25 DEP-Plasma Pistol, a combat knife, and his hacking unit.

Once everyone was ready to go they went to the hangar bay. There two stealth phantoms were waiting for them to drop them on their respective landing zones.

"Okay team remember, try to avoid any kind of contact, and if you have to engage the patrols, make sure that nobody finds the bodies. We can't let them figure it out that we are on the planet, understood?"

"Yes sir" Yeg and Reth replied while G-4 only nodded.

Francis nodded at them before he and Reth got inside Phantom 1 to recon and hack the sensors zone, while Yeg and G-4 got on Phantom 2 towards the jammer.

After some minutes both Phantoms took off towards their respective objectives, both being camouflaged in the dark of the night.

September 6, 2574, 0510 Hours, System Alliance Calendar, Voyager Cluster, Pheiros, Phantom-1, in route towards sensor zone_**._**_

Both Francis, and Reth didn't spoke for the duration of the flight, opting instead to check their weapons and equipment for a second time.

[60 seconds till we arrive to our landing zone recon team.] The pilot of the Phantom informed.

[Understood.] Francis said.

The phantom landed 500 m north from the perimeter of the sensors zone. Both Francis and Reth took off immediately towards some close rocks in the distance, both taking cover while watching the phantom return to the prowler.

[Ready Reth?] Francis asked.

[Yes sir.] Reth informed.

The both started moving towards the perimeter of the sensors zone. After 5 minutes of walking through the forest, Francis made a fist sign, [4 Contacts at 2 o'clock.] he informed.

[Do we take them down sir?] Reth asked.

[Negative, let them pass through.] Francis said.

They waited until the patrol passed through, then started moving again. They repeated the process for another 3 times before getting on visual range of the first sensor outpost.

They both watched as one of the security officers talked with the one managing the sensors. [Let's move while they are distracted.] Francis said.

Reth nodded and both of them continued moving. They passed close by the station when they heard, "Hey, I think I saw something moving over there." The Turian managing the sensor station said to the other Turian. "I'll go check, keep an eye on the sensors." The other one said.

[Shit, activate camouflage modules.] Francis told Reth. Then, the both of them disappeared in the middle of the night.

When the Turian turned to their position, he saw nothing unusual after checking the area. "Hmm, maybe it was an animal." He said before turning to head back towards the station.

[That was close.] Reth said.

[That it was. Let's keep moving.] Francis said.

They both continued moving towards the center of the zone, were they suspected was the localization of the central command of all the sensors in the area.

****September 6, 2574, 0520 Hours, System Alliance Calendar, Voyager Cluster, Pheiros, Jammer zone.****

Yeg and G-4 were both observing the jammer tower from a hill that was 100 m from the jammer. Yeg was watching the area through the scope of his Beam Rifle, so far he had seen 2 guards on the entrance of the tower, 3 sniper nests, and 4 patrols on the perimeter.

[Security is tight I can't take one of them down without alerting the others.] Yeg informed.

[What about a distraction? That way I could sneak in while their attention is diverted.] G-4 suggested.

[I can give you that, but you will have to get close to the entrance.] Yeg said.

G-4 nodded before flying with his camouflage unit activated towards the wall of the tower. [I'm in position, ready to enter the tower.] G-4 informed.

[Acknowledge, wait for the signal.] Yeg said.

He took aim at one of the vehicles stationed in there, aiming for the engine, once he estimated where the engine was located, he took a deep breath, calculated the distance, altitude, humidity, rotation of the planet, the velocity of the wind, and then pressed the trigger of his Beam Rifle, firing a concentrated beam shot. He saw as the line of light left by the shot traveled towards the vehicle, once it impacted, an explosion engulfed the entire vehicle, calling the attention of the Turians guarding the tower.

When G-4 saw the explosion he activated his camouflage unit and flew towards the entrance. Once inside he made his way towards the central computer of the jammer and started hacking its systems. [I'm hacking the jammer now, it should let us scan the base in 8 minutes.] He told Yeg.

[You might want to hurry up, the Turians are moving inside the tower, I think they know that they are not alone here.] Yeg commented.

[Understood.] G-4 said.

After finishing hacking the jammer, he disconnected himself from the system and headed towards the entrance of the tower. But before G-4 could get there, he saw 2 Turians on the next corridor, coming towards his position, he immediately activated his camouflage and got to the ceiling of the corridor. "Come on, let's check the control room, if someone was responsible for that explosion it probably wanted to hack the systems." One of the Turians said. "Yes sir." The other responded.

G-4 knew that he would have to take them out before they checked the systems and founded the bug, which he implanted in the system, which would become part of the system in 2 minutes.

He took out his combat knife and prepared himself. "Do you think that it was the Geth sir?" One of them asked. "It is possible." The other responded, while passing underneath G-4.

Once they passed, G-4 got down and closed the distance between them, when he got behind one of the Turians he took him by the head, covering his mouth in the process while inserting the knife on the Turian's neck, killing him instantly. But he didn't go unnoticed, because once he let the body fall the other Turian turned, ready to fire, but G-4 was prepared. He launched himself at the Turian, knocking him towards the floor and making him loose his rifle. But before he could kill him with his knife, the Turian delivered a punch towards his face, sending him flying, before getting up again.

The Turian officer was ready to engage the insect like alien when he suddenly disappeared. He took out his M-3 Predator and started looking for distortions signs on his surroundings, but when he saw them in front of him it was already too late. He only saw the shiny blade of the knife and then nothing before falling dead before hitting the floor.

G-4 took his knife out of the head of the Turian, and then proceeded to hide the bodies of both Turians behind some stack boxes that were in an adjacent corridor.

[Yeg, I had an engagement with two Turians.] G-4 reported.

[Did you hide the bodies?] Yeg asked.

[Affirmative, but it will only take time before the Turians figure out that those two are missing.] G-4 responded.

[In that case let's hurry and get to the extraction zone.] Yeg said.

[Got it.] G-4 responded and headed back towards the entrance. Once he was there he contacted Yeg, [Yeg how's the situation outside?] he asked.

[They are under alert, I'll give you a window so you can get out.] Yeg informed.

[Acknowledge.] G-4 responded.

Outside the situation was a controlled chaos, some Turians were looking around for possible intruders, others were investigating the explosion site, and the snipers were looking for any sign of enemies like hawks. Yeg needed to divert their attention, so G-4 could get out without being noticed; even if he used the camouflage to get out, he could be spotted by the distortions that he gave when he is moving too fast. So that's why when Yeg saw one Turian coming towards his position he took out one of his combat knives and rushed towards the Turian from the side, taking him out in one swift move. Yeg took the rifle from the Turian and started shooting towards the forest, getting the attention of the Turians on the base.

Once he could hear them coming towards his position he dropped the rifle and ran towards the extraction zone. [G-4 did you got out of the base?] He asked.

[Affirmative, I'm moving towards the extraction zone. I suppose that you were responsible for those shootings?] G-4 asked.

Yeg chuckled, [You know me too well my friend.] He said while running.

Once both reached the extraction zone, which was at 1 Km from the jammer, Yeg contacted the Phantom. [Here hacking team, our mission was a success, we solicit a Phantom drop ship for extraction, over.]

[Here Phantom-2, we hear you hacking team, arriving at your position in 1 minute, over.]

[Roger that Phantom-2.] Yeg said.

****September 6, 2574, 0540 Hours, System Alliance Calendar, Voyager Cluster, Pheiros, Sensor zone**_**._**_**

It had taken time to arrive at the central command post of the sensors, but Francis and Reth managed to get there without being detected. Both of them were currently overseeing the command post from a hill that was at 50 m from the command center. Francis had taken his binoculars out and was currently surveilling the area while Reth had his Plasma Repeater at the ready.

[The command post doesn't looks heavily defended, only 4 guards around it. I think they didn't thought that someone could make it this far without being detected.] Francis said.

[Do we eliminate them sir?] Reth asked.

[Affirmative, you take the ones on the left side, while I'll take the ones on the right. Let's do this fast and quietly.] Francis said.

Reth nodded and both walked towards the guards. Francis took out his silenced M6G Magnum and his combat knife. He stabbed the first guard on the neck, and then fired 5 rapid successive shots towards the second guard, negating him the chance to look for cover or use his rifle against him. Both of the guards dropped to the floor dead in less than 5 seconds.

While that happened, Reth approached his two guards, his knife and Plasma pistol in his hands, he stabbed the guard on the left first, killing him instantly without the other noticing, he then approached the second and like the first one he dropped dead without knowing what happened.

Both Reth and Francis regrouped on the door that lead to the command center. [Okay this is the plan, I'll knock on the door and when the Turian opens it you kill him.] Francis said while getting on position.

Reth nodded and took out his Repeater, ready to shot in sight. Inside the Turian officer was checking the status of the sensors stations on the perimeter of the cannon, when he heard a knock on the door. 'What do they want now?' he thought while opening the door. But when he looked to see which guard had knocked, he was meet by the cannon of a gun that he had never seen in all his military career before falling dead. Outside, both Reth and Francis were surprised to find out that their plasma weapons could completely ignore the shields of the enemy.

[I guess you learn something new every day huh?] Reth commented.

Francis could only nod to that before both he and Reth headed inside after hiding the 5 bodies in some shrubs nearby.

[Sir, do you read? Here hacking team over.] Francis heard on his communications unit.

[Affirmative hacking team, what's your status?] Francis asked.

[Our mission was a success, but they now know that someone is here on the planet with them.] Yeg reported.

[Understood, where are you?] Francis asked.

[On standby near the perimeter of the sensors zone until they are down.] Yeg reported.

[Got it, I'm loading the virus on their sensors, they should be down in 60 seconds over.] Francis said.

[Understood sir, hacking team out.] Yeg said.

[Okay Reth let's get out of here, our mission is completed.]

Reth nodded and both headed to their extraction zone. Once in there Francis contacted the Phantom for pick up while Reth contacted the hacking team to give them the green light to proceed to the cliff of the cannon.

****September 6, 2172, 0530 Hours, Citadel Council Calendar,
Beta-Prometheus System, Big Ring.*

The first thing that Saren saw after waking up was the brilliant light of the day, after that he felt an intense pain providing from his chest, 'ugh' I think that my ribs are broken' he thought before standing up and looking at his surroundings.

After making sure that he was secure on his position he injected some MediGel on his chest, to null the pain and hold his ribs until he received proper medical attention on the camp site.

He took out his M-3 Predator pistol, having lost his assault rifle on the explosion, and stared heading north towards the camp site.

[Here SPECTRE agent Saren Arterius to camp site, do you read?] He said via his Omni-tool.

[â€¦] Static.

[Here SPECTRE agent Saren Arterius to any frequency, do you read?] He tried again.

[â€¦] More Static.

'Damn, it appears that, that explosion messed up my communications systems.' He thought.

Saren sighted and continued moving through the forest, all the while thinking of the battle, (if he even could call that massacre a battle), which happened outside the facility. 'What could be inside that place that it was so important to send those juggernauts of Guardians to defend it?' he asked himself, 'Could it be some kind of advanced technology, weapons, or something that wasn't for our prying eyes?' he wondered.

Saren kept that line of thought while walking through the forest. After 30 minutes of wandering, he finally got sight of the camp. He started moving towards it, getting spotted by a patrol group in the process.

When the patrol group spotted him, they immediately recognized him, he was the SPECTRE agent that was reported KIA an hour ago. They immediately went towards him to help and find out what happened.

"Sir? what happened to you?" one of them asked.

"Got attacked on the facility siteâ€| only 2 survivorsâ€| got shot by some kind of missileâ€| broken ribsâ€|" he said between breaths.

"Lieutenant, get a medical facility ready, now! We are taking him there for medical treatment." The commanding officer of the patrol said.

"Yes Ma'am!" he said before running off towards the camp.

"Private help me take him to the medical facility." She said.

The private nodded and both, she and the private took off towards the medical facility, carrying Saren and making sure that he stayed conscious. Once they arrived there, a Salarian doctor immediately started making diagnostics and checking his vital systems.

"It appears that he has a concussion, 3 broken ribs, 2 broken fingers, internal damage to the organs, and several third level burns, of which some of them got infected. I'll have to transport him to a ship on orbit to give him proper medical attention. All I can do now is stabilize him." The doctor informed while working on him.

"Lieutenant, get me a line to the _Eternal Light_." The officer commanded.

The lieutenant immediately sent the transmission towards the ship. "Ma'am the _Eternal Light_ is on the line." He informed.

[Here Lieutenant Commander Tela Vasir, we request a shuttle to transport a critical SPECTRE agent for medical attention on the ship, over.]

[Acknowledge, here Captain Tristana of the _Eternal Light_, we are sending a shuttle, ETA 3 minutes, _Eternal Light_ out.]

"Shuttle is inbound, prepare the patient for transportation." Tela ordered before heading off towards the landing pad.

**202,574, 0530 Hours, Forerunner Calendar, Labeled
****Beta-Prometheus System by the Citadel Council, Installation
06**_**.**-

216-Redeemer watched as the Citadel forces regrouped on their camping zone, after getting ambushed by Sentinels on multiple facilities. He had managed to stall their excavation attempts for a short period of time. He knew that they wouldn't leave this ring until they found everything about it.

Redeemer made the artificial version of a sight, 'How dense can their species be?' he thought. 'It's just a matter of time before they liberate the Flood, I'll have to prepare the containment protocols.' He knew that if he didn't acted now to contain the Flood once it managed to escape, he would lose the installation in a matter of days; after all, he only had Major and Enforcer class sentinels at his disposition, and while they were designed to combat Flood forces, they wouldn't last much once a total outbreak occurred.

[All sentinels prepare to proceed with the containment protocol.] Redeemer ordered to all the sentinels on the installation, if he timed this right he could avoid a massive out brake on the installation.

September 6, 2172, 0600 Hours, Citadel Council Calendar, Voyager Cluster, Pheiros outpost.

"Sir, I'm getting a transmission from the jammer zone" a communications officer informed.

"Patch it through officer." General Illo responded.

"Yes sir, transmission on the main screen."

Illo looked at the main screen and saw the commanding officer of the forces guarding the jammer that had been deployed to interfere on any transmission or scan that didn't had the security codes, thus making the enemy forces more vulnerable.

[General, we got a situation on here.] The Turian on the screen said.

[Care to elaborate Major.] Illo said.

[We were attacked sir. We got one recognizance vehicle down, 1 confirmed KIA, and 2 MIA guards sir.] The major reported.

[Have you checked the systems of the jammer yet?] Illo asked.

[Affirmative, we didn't detect any fluctuations with the system.]

[Good, secure the area Major and find me those 2 MIA Turians, they couldn't disappear just like that.] Illo ordered.

[Yes sir.] The Major said before disconnecting the line.

"Private give me a line with the sensors command post." Illo ordered.

"Yes sir."

'Something is wrong here, why would someone attack the jammer and don't try to deactivate it?' Illo wondered.

"Sir, the Sensors Command Post isn't responding to any of my transmissions." The private reported.

"Then something is happening in there. Lieutenant Korial, head to the Sensors Command Post and investigate why they aren't responding our transmissions" Illo ordered.

"Yes Sir." Korial responded.

'There's something definitely wrong going on here.' Illo thought.

****September 6, 2574, 0610 Hours, System Alliance Calendar, Voyager Cluster, Pheiros, Cliff of the Cannon, North side of the Planetary Base.****

On the North side of the Pheiros outpost was the cliff of the cannon in which the base was stationed, it was a dangerous point of insertion, if you didn't used an aerial insertion method. Two guards were looking at the horizon, where the sunrise was just starting. Neither of them saw as 2 Stealth Phantoms passed at 100 m below their position, nor did they see when both Phantoms deployed the 4 members of GHOST team. After all, if any unauthorized aircraft passed through the forest, the sensor stations would alert them. But they hadn't count on, that someone, had just hacked their sensor systems. And when both of them were stabbed in the neck, they didn't even had time to register what happened before falling towards the cliff, long dead before they impacted the ground.

"Okay team, precise scans show that the main server is one floor down, and in the center of the facility. We are going to enter the base by the back door, and from there we will navigate through the ventilation conducts towards the server. Once in there, we download the information, and we get out through the maintenance tunnels, there is an adjacent tunnel that leads to the outside, just in the center of the cliff. There would be a Phantom drop ship waiting to extract us." Francis informed them while showing their route in a holographic display of the base.

"What if we are detected on the ventilation conducts or in the tunnels?" Reth asked.

"G-4, care to explain?" he asked.

[When I hacked the jammer tower, the bug that I implanted on the system gave me access to the base systems. Once we are inside the base I'll hide us from their sensors.] G-4 explained.

"Good enough for me." Reth said.

"Any more questions people?" Francis asked.

["No sir."] The rest of the team said.

"Good, let's move, once we are inside use only radio contact."
Francis commanded.

The team nodded and moved to back door of the base, which resulted to be a resupply entrance. There were currently only 2 guards on the door. Francis ordered G-4 and Reth to move to the roof of the base to dispatch the guards from the top, using their knives. Once both guards were dealt with, the team moved inside.

GHOST team encountered itself in a long corridor with many doors on the sides. All of them activated their camouflage units and started moving through it. After walking 2 more corridors they found a ventilation grille, they took off the grille and went inside, G-4 being the last to enter so he could put back the grille in its place.

The ventilation tunnels were small, but all members of the team managed to fit and move through them in a very tight position. During their travel they saw many Turian patrols on the corridors, as well as a command center, where one of the Turians was communicating with what remained of the fleet above the planet.

It took them about half an hour before they reached the main server on sublevel 1, but when they got there, Francis saw 4 Turians patrolling the server.

[4 confirmed contacts ahead, possible more inside the room, prepare for engagement.] He informed the rest of the team.

Everyone nodded, and Francis opened the grille of the ventilation conduct when the area was clear of prying eyes. One by one they got out of the ventilation systems and took cover on some nearby servers. [G-4 and Yeg, you two take the guards on the high ground, Reth you are with me. Have your camouflage units activated and try to not engage them on a firefight understood?] Everyone nodded and then GHOST team divided itself to clear the area.

Yeg jumped from one server to an adjacent wall that he used to impulse himself to the second level, while G-4 just flew up there. Once both were up there Yeg took the main corridor towards a pair of guards on the left side taking them out with his dual combat knives, while G-4 went to the ceiling and moved towards another pair of guards on the left side, taking them out with his knife and an overloaded Plasma Pistol charge.

Meanwhile Francis and Reth had taken 2 of the 4 guards on the first floor when the other 2 guards turned to their corridor and saw them, they immediately went to aim their weapons at them but two fast beam shots interrupted and ended the incoming firefight. Francis looked up and saw Yeg with his Beam Rifle, smoke coming from the barrel of the gun, he nodded a sign of thanks before moving towards the main server, Yeg and G-4 not far behind.

G-4 took out his hacking unit and immediately connected himself to the server, coping and sending all the information towards the _Eagles Eye_, while the rest of GHOST team watched the server room for any sign of hostiles.

****September 6, 2172, 0650 Hours, Citadel Council Calendar, Voyager Cluster, Pheiros outpost.****

"Sir! One of the patrol groups found the guards on the north side entrance, both of them are death." The communications officer said.

"What?!" Illo said surprised. 'We have been infiltrated.' Was everything Illo thought, "Officer has any other patrol group reported anything?" He asked.

"Negative sir" the officer responded, "Sir incoming transmission from Lieutenant Korial."

"Put it on screen." Illo said.

"Yes sir."

On the screen appeared the Lieutenant commando Korial, with a worried expression on her face, "General, I have found what happened here, the guards and the commanding officer of the command post are dead, 3 of them were stabbed on the neck, 1 was shot with a low caliber gun, probably a pistol, and the other one appears to have died from some kind of incendiary weapon that melted his face." She reported.

Illo processed the information, but as hard as he tried, he couldn't pin point the ones responsible for this. He suspected that the Geth were responsible, the incendiary level that could melt flesh and bone was a characteristic of their pulse rifles after all, and also the way that they had managed to attack the 2 defense points and infiltrate the base in a short amount of time, suggested good planning and coordination, which also pin pointed to Geth tactics.

Before Illo could make an order, Talak, the systems expert, said, "Sir I'm detecting an external entry on the central server, it appears that it is downloading all the information on it!" he exclaimed.

"Shut down the server immediately and send 2 teams to secure the server room NOW!" Illo ordered.

"Server has been shut down sir." Talak responded.

"Teams on route towards the server sir." The communications officer informed.

'I can't believe that I didn't saw this coming sooner' Illo thought.

****September 6, 2574, 0655 Hours, System Alliance Calendar, Voyager Cluster, Pheiros, Planetary Base, Server Room.****

[Sir, the server has been shut down, I'm disconnected.] G-4 informed.

[Damn, how much data did you managed to download?] Francis asked.

[83.2% sir.] G-4 responded.

[That will have to do. Okay people move towards the maintenance

tunnels, we are leaving now.] Francis said.

[Yes sir.] Everyone responded.

GHOST team activated its camouflage units and headed out of the server room moving through the corridors towards the maintenance tunnels. They had to stop and hide on different rooms, or behind cargo boxes, multiple times when Turian patrols passed by, to avoid any kind of visual detection.

Once they got inside the maintenance tunnels, Reth contacted the Phantom, [Here GHOST team approaching towards extraction point, we are ready to go, do you copy?]

[Here Phantom-1, we copy you, we are in route towards extraction point, ETA 2 minutes, over.]

[Roger that, over.] Reth replied. [Sir Phantom arrives in 2 minutes.]

[Roger that Reth.] Francis replied.

After 3 minutes of running through the tunnels, GHOST team got to the extraction point where Phantom-1 was waiting for them. They got aboard and the Phantom took off towards the _Eagles Eye, _undetected by the radar and sensors of the planetary base that they had just infiltrated.

****September 6, 2172, 0720 Hours, Citadel Council Calendar, Voyager Cluster, Pheiros outpost.****

"Sir, patrol groups report that their sectors are clear of contacts." The communications officer said.

Illo sighted, "Lieutenant, what's your report?" he asked Korial.

"Sir all the attacks and way that the guards died, suggest that an infiltration Geth team was here. Probably deployed when our fleet and the Geth one engaged each other." Korial reported.

"I'm sensing a 'but' in there Lieutenant." Illo pointed out.

"Sir, the guard shot down by a pistol on the Sensors Command Center, doesn't fit in all of this. It is a heavy round caliber, probably from an M-6 Carnifex or an M-77 Paladin, but we know that the Geth don't use those pistols because of their inaccuracy on mid-long range targets" Korial explained. "Right now I put a team to analyze the remains of the bullet that we found."

"If that's the case, then we are missing something on here. Keep investigating everything that happened Lieutenant, dismissed." Illo said.

"Sir." Korial saluted and then took off.

"Communications officer, send word to the Hierarchy, tell them what happened here."

"Yes sir"

****September 6, 2574, 0710 Hours, System Alliance Calendar, Voyager Cluster, Pheiros, **_**Eagles Eye **_**Prowler, Bridge.****

Once the Phantoms landed on the hangar of the _Eagles Eye_, Francis made his way towards the bridge to make his report. In the bridge he found the Lieutenant Commander analyzing the information downloaded from the base. "Sir." He saluted.

"At ease Gunnery Sergeant," Smith said, "what's your report."

"Sir, while my team succeeded on diverting the enemy attention towards the Geth, we couldn't download all the information on the server before we were detected on the systems." Francis said.

Smith nodded at that and then said, "Raven send this information to high command." Raven appeared on the holographic display and nodded to the Commander before doing as he was asked. "Gunnery Sergeant you are dismissed, tell your team that they did a good job down there."

"A good job sir?" Francis asked.

"Yes Sergeant, even if your team didn't managed to download all the information, you did managed to take some pressure off of the System Alliance." Smith clarified.

"Sir." Francis saluted and turned to go to the armory and inform the rest of his team.

****September 10, 2574, 1400 Hours, System Alliance Calendar,***Reincarnation System, Arcturus Station.****

On the inside of Arcturus station the President of the Alliance, Jonatan Vasquez, walked towards the meeting room on the superior levels. He had been informed by high command that they were ready to share the information found on the Turian base.

During the past 4 days he had been insisting that they informed him of their findings, but all the response he got was, "We are still analyzing the data Mr. President." And then they left whatever place that they were on. 'Analyzing the data? More like classifying most of it.' He thought. It wasn't that he was an impatient man, but he needed something to tell the civilians about those "rumors" that said that the Alliance had made contact with other aliens.

When he arrived at the meeting room he saw that Lord Hood, the Arbiter Thel Vadam and someone that he didn't recognize, but that had the emblem of ONI, were already in there, waiting for him.

"My apologies gentlemen, I got trapped by the press on my way here." Jonatan explained.

"There's nothing to apologize for, Mr. President. Now I believe that you hadn't had the pleasure to meet the pupil of the head of ONI, Matt Rogers." Lord Hood said.

"It's a pleasure Mr. Rogers." The president said.

"Like ways Mr. President, I'll be the one representing ONI for the

time being." Matt said without much clarification.

"Now we can proceed with this meeting." Hood said.

"Mr. President, the data that we found on the planetary base appears to indicate that the purpose of that installation was to track communications of mercenary bands and Geth forces in that cluster. We also managed to found the designation for the different sectors of the Galaxy, and part of their star charts, as well as their stand and importance to the Citadel government" Matt explained.

"And how does this help us when we meet the Citadel Council?" The president asked.

"Simple, once the fleet that we are going to send through the relay, to meet with the Citadel representatives, arrives at the other side, we ask the citadel representatives to align their fleet, between our ships to make a massive slipspace jump towards the Citadel Station. That way we show the citadel that, unlike them, we don't depend on their relay network, turning the negotiations on our favor. Once they know that if we want, we could travel to any of their systems without them having the power to regulate or stop our ships. That would make the negotiations to go more on our favor." Matt explained.

"Okay I'm following, but what should I tell the civilians, once they know that we are preparing a fleet to go to 'Unknown space', they will ask questions." Jonatan said.

"Tell them that we have made a peaceful contact with an alien government, and that we are going to meet with their leaders to establish a good relationship with them." Hood said.

"Okay that will calm the masses." The president said, "Now, who will be sent to the Citadel?"

"Fleet Master R'tas 'Vadum will go and represent the military branch of the Alliance, Matt Rogers will represent ONI. We suggest that the Vice-President goes with them to represent the civilian part of our government." Hood said.

"Okay, what about the fleet, and the guards that will escort the representatives?" Jonatan asked.

"The fleet of Glory Reclamation will go, as well a group of ODSTs and Honor Guards to escort our representatives." Thel informed.

"Isn't that just a little too much? I mean, we are going for peace relationships with them, and we show up with enough fire power to level an entire system?" The president asked with a raised eyebrow.

"That's one of the reasons, while we don't want to show our full military power, we still want to send a warning of what awaits them if they decide to attack us. That's also why we are pulling out the Super Carrier _Darkness Coming _from the fleet and putting the Carrier _Shadow of Intel _at command of the fleet." Matt said.

"Okay that will work. Then I guess this meeting is over. Gentleman, have a good day." The President said before leaving the room and prepare a press conference.

"I suppose that there's also another reason that we are sending the fleet of Glory Reclamation to the Citadel right?" Thel asked.

"That's right Arbiter, if we send the Glory Reclamation fleet to the Citadel, we can pull out the _Darkness Coming _without any more questions and send it with the Infinity battle group towards what we presume is the location of another Halo." Matt said.

"I presume that this location is the same as the one were 'The Big Ring' is?" Hood asked. When high command had found that particular bit of information on the data sent to them from the _Eagles Eye_, they had speculated that this 'Big Ring' was another Halo, after all, how many installations with the form of a big ring could be out there and not being a halo right?

"Yes Lord Hood, you are correct." Matt confirmed his suspicious.

"Okay I'll grant permission to the operation, but only if ONI sends prowlers to confirm that a Halo is in that system, and also if the Arbiter is in charge of the operation."

"I can manage to send some prowlers there first, and it was ONI's intentions that Thel commanded the entire operation." Matt said.

Hood and Thel nodded, they couldn't just left a weapon of galactic scales to the hands of unexperienced people that could activate it by accident, killing everyone in a 250,000 light years radius.

The 3 then left the meeting room to attend to their priorities. They had things to prepare before meeting with the Citadel Council in 3 days.

****September 10, 2172, 1400 Hours, Citadel Council Calendar, Widow System, Citadel Presidium, Council Chambers.****

Like their counterparts on the Orion sector of the galaxy, the 3 members of the council were also having a meeting to discuss the System Alliance. On this moment Sparatus was informing the other two councilors about the attack on the Pheiros outpost.

"â€| and those are the reasons that, General Illo thinks that the Geth weren't responsible for the attack." Sparatus finished explaining.

"So you believe that the System Alliance was involved on this?" Valern asked.

"Frankly, yes. The reason I believe that is because I would have done the same to them, if I had the opportunity. How much information about your enemies you have, determines the level of control that you have on the playing field." Sparatus explained.

"We still don't have concrete evidence to link this with them, everything about the attack points to the Geth except for that bullet that the Hierarchy found." Tevos said.

"And that's where things get interesting Tevos. The Hierarchy analysts, report that the bullet founded, doesn't belong to any weapon manufactured in all Citadel Space, Terminus systems, or the Perseus Veil. Also the bullet appears to belong to a ballistic kind of weapon, very primitive compared with the weapons systems that we use now, but none the less effective against its targets." Sparatus informed.

"Okay maybe the Alliance was responsible for the attack but it is still not enough proof to accuse them, if we do it during the negotiations, we could lose a potential ally to the Citadel." Tevos explained.

"I can see your point, but we also can't do nothing about it, after all they just attacked one of the Hierarchy installations." Sparatus pointed out.

"Maybe we can't do anything officially about this, but unofficially we can." Valern said. "I'll transmit new orders to the STG stealth vessels that are in route to Alliance space, they will try to get more information on the Alliance and their capabilities." Valern said.

Sparatus nodded his thanks to the Salarian, "Now what should we do with the situation with the AIs that the Alliance uses?" Sparatus asked.

"Let them explain the reasons that they have to use them, after all they have already been given the clearance to bring one aboard, and as long as no one else knows about it and that they don't plug it in our systems, we will have no problems with them. If the AIs demonstrate to be a danger to our society, we establish on our demands that they have to get rid of them, if not we put them on probation for a period of 6 years, saying that if nothing happens regarding the AIs in that time, they would be allowed on Citadel space." Tevos said.

"I agree with that." Valern said.

Sparatus seemed a little reluctant to comply with that decision but in the end he nodded his agreement. After that the councilors retired to their personal chambers, they have had a difficult day and they needed the brake. 'Whoever said that being a politician would be easy, was totally wrong and also was a complete idiot.' Sparatus thought before moving to his chambers.

****A/N:** And here we got the third chapter of this story. Please review and submit new OCs I promise that I will use them for good, and I will not kill them after one chapter haha xD.******

****Now the codex of this story has been updated. It will be presented as an edited one.****

****Thanks for reading until next time.****

4. Politics and What Resides Beneath

The Next Great Journey

****A/N:** Hey I'm sorry for the long wait, but with school, studding, and trying to find time to write is kind of difficult. Also thanks to the people that had reviewed so far and for those that follow and have clicked favorite for this story, I appreciate that. ******

****Now** some persons have asked me, 'why the System Alliance attacked the Geth based on the information that the Turians gave them and when it wasn't their problem?' Here's why. When the Alliance passed through the relay, they didn't have any clue as to where in the galaxy they were. So when the Turians made contact with them and they saw the first contact package of the citadel, they knew that the big players on this bigger part of the Galaxy, were the Council. So when the Geth attacked the Turians, they only decided to help them fight the Geth so they could get points in favor of the Citadel Council, which would end helping them to have more space to move and act on the shadows without too many prying eyes.******

****Now** that that's explained onto the chapter.******

*****Chapter** has been edited after some logical errors made by me were marked by someone.
Thanks.*******

*****Speaking*****

'Thoughts'****

****[Radio Communications]****

****Disclaimer:** I don't own Halo or Mass Effect both belong to their perspective owners. Any similarities between this chapter and Halo 1 and Halo The Flood belong to their respective authors.******

Chapter 4: Politics and What Resides Beneath

****September 10, 2574, 1600 Hours, System Alliance Calendar,***Reincarnation System, Arcturus Station.****

Spartan II John-117, also known as Master Chief, walked through the corridors of Arcturus Station towards the office of Lord Admiral Terrance Hood. He had received a message from the Admiral to meet with him, saying that it was of great importance. John immediately set pace towards his office, while thinking of what had happened in the years after the death of Cortana.

During the past decade, he had been stationed all over the border of Loyalist space, working with ONI to locate the other half of the Janus Key. So far they hadn't been successful, they suspected that the Loyalist had the Key guarded right in the hearth of their space. But every prowler sent there hadn't returned, which is why ONI stopped sending more and decided to take a more patient approach.

After the events on the Deca-5 system 5 days ago, he had been instructed to return to Arcturus Station to await for new orders. When he arrived 3 days ago he had been given a package with the information regarding said events.

Once he had finished studding and analyzing the information, he had been going to the armory to practice his shooting skills, but this

time he had set the targets to have more resistant shields to kinetic weaponry to try and mimic the shields that the Citadel species used. If things got out of hand during the peace talks in 2 days, he would be prepared to engage them.

After taking 2 elevators and 3 more corridors John finally made it to the Admiral's office security checkpoint. He gave his fingerprints to a scan, followed by an eye scan, a blood sample, and finally a voice password confirmation. The reason that all this security measures were present was because, there had been many attempts of assassination to high ranking officers of the Alliance in the past decade.

Once John finished with all the scans, he made his way inside the office where Lord Hood was already waiting for him. "Sir." He immediately saluted.

"At ease Chief, take a seat." Hood saluted back.

John did as he was asked and sat in front of Lord Hood.

"How has the activity in the border been going Chief?" Hood asked.

"Everything is under control in the border Sir, there had only been small engagements. ONI thinks that the Loyalist are planning something big, but they hadn't found anything suspicious yet." John informed.

"I see."

"Sir, if I may?" Hood nodded towards John's question, "I suppose that you didn't call me just to ask about the border patrols, am I correct sir?" John asked.

"You are correct Chief. The real reason is because I'm transferring you to the Infinity Battle Group."

"Any particular reason sir?" John asked a little confused. He knew that the Infinity Battle Group was a defense fleet on the border opposite to the Loyalist's border, and as such they didn't need as much help patrolling it. And for sure not the help of a Spartan, not when they already had 2 squads of Spartan IVs stationed on the Infinity.

"Yes. I suppose you already read the reports that were sent you?" Hood asked.

"Yes sir."

"Good. Now as you may already know, 5 days ago we had a first contact scenario after investigating an artifact. The species that we encountered were guarding some kind of communications/early alert planetary base on the system. After establishing contact with the Turians, an unknown fleet arrived at the system to attack the base. Our ships that were on the system offered their support and engaged this unknown. While normally we wouldn't do such a thing, this time we needed points in favor with the Citadel, which is the multi-species government to which the Turians form part of, that way we have the opportunity to find more about them without too many eyes

observing." Hood explained, "Once ONI got the information that we needed we discovered some entries in the communication records regarding something referred as The Big Ring."

John got a thoughtful expression at hearing this, 'Could it be that this Citadel found one of the Halos?' he wondered.

"By your silence I assume that you had reached the same conclusion that ONI and High Command has." Hood said.

"Sir if that entry refers to another Halo, then we need to do something about it, before they activate it by accident, or liberate the Flood if there's any." Chief said.

"Exactly our thoughts and fears Chief. That's why I'm reassigning you to the Infinity Battle Group. You are one of the few that have experience with the Halos and the Flood, that's still alive. If we encounter any problems in there, I want to make sure that we can deal with them before the situation escalates." Hood said.

"Sir are we sure that there's definitely a Halo in that system?"

"ONI will send a prowler to confirm our suspicious one day before we have the meeting with the Citadel Council, if they are correct then the Infinity Battle Group would be at a 10 hour jump from there."

John nodded and then saluted, ready to leave and prepare his equipment for the transfer. But before he could leave, Hood called once more.

"One more thing Chief. An old friend of yours is in charge of this operation." Hood said with the trace of a smile.

"Old friend sir?" John asked a little bit confused.

"The Arbiter Thel Vadam will be accompanying the Infinity Battle Group aboard the _Darkness Coming_." Hood clarified.

John nodded and left the office, all the while remembering the time that he and the Arbiter fought side by side on the Ark. 'If the Arbiter is going, then it is almost accurate to assume that there is a Halo, and if there is a Halo then the Flood can't be far behind.' He thought.

September 11, 2574, 0800 Hours, System Alliance Calendar,**Reincarnation System, Stealth Prowler ****_Early Arrival_****.**

Captain Ronald Foley was currently on the bridge of his ship. He had been assigned with the task of entering the system were a Halo ring was suspected to be. If there was confirmation that it was one on the system, they were to send a signal to the Infinity Battle Group confirming the presence, if not they were to investigate the system and inform the Infinity Battle Group of their findings.

"Communications officer, contact Arcturus command." He said.

"Yes sir, Arcturus command in the line."

[Here captain Foley of the _Early Arrival_, we are ready to go. Do we have clearance?]

[_Early Arrival_, here Arcturus command, you have authorization to leave over.]

[Understood, over.]

"Pilot set course to the given coordinates." Foley ordered.

And then he watched as the ship entered slipspace towards its destination. "Commander, you have the bridge. I'll be in my quarters, call me half an hour before we exit slipspace."

"Yes sir."

And Ronald left the bridge, sure that the Commander will have everything under control during his absence.

September 11, 2574, 1755 Hours, System Alliance Calendar, Unknown System, Stealth Prowler **_Early Arrival_****.**

Captain Foley was on the bridge, waiting for the ship to exit slipspace and complete his mission. He had been called to the bridge 25 minutes ago, just as he had instructed the Commander. Once he arrived, he started to make sure that everything was in green status and ready to go.

"Sir exiting slipspace in 5â€|4â€|3â€|2â€|1, we are in the system sir. Entering stealth mode now." The pilot informed.

"Understood, systems officer scan the system and find me that ring."

"Yes sir, scanning."

"Communications be ready to inform the Infinity Battle Group of our findings."

"Yes sir."

"Sir, scan complete. We have confirmation that the ring is on the system, also there are 5 ships orbiting the ring sir." The systems officer informed.

"Put it on the tactical screen." Foley ordered.

He turned to the tactical screen and saw that the ships and the ring were orbiting the third planet closest to the star on the system. He also saw the big gaseous planet that was the fifth closest to the star, and an idea formed on his head.

"Communications, send the positive signal to the Battle Group, along with the following coordinates for arrival."

"Yes sir."

The coordinates that the Captain had ordered to send, were so that

the Battle Group could exit right next to the fifth planet, hiding their presence to the ships on the ring thanks to the interference that the storms on the planet gave.

****September 11, 2574, 1810 Hours, System Alliance
Calendar,****Reincarnation System, CSO-Class Super Carrier
****_Darkness Coming_****.****

Arbiter Thel Vadam was currently on the bridge waiting for the signal from the prowler, confirming the presence of a Halo ring on the system so his battle group could leave. This battle group consisted of, 3 SDV-Class Corvettes, the Infinity and her 10 Charon Class Frigates, that were still stationed inside the Infiniti's hangar, and finally his ship.

"Arbiter, we have confirmation of our objective." A Sangheili operating the communications console informed.

"Inform the rest of the Battle Group that we are entering slipspace towards our objective." Thel said.

"Message sent Arbiter."

Thel nodded and watched as the Battle Group entered the void of slipspace towards their destination.

****September 11, 2172, 1900 Hours, Citadel Council Calendar,
****Beta-Prometheus System, Asari Frigate **_**Eternal Light**_**,
Medical Deck, Orbit around the Big Ring.****

Saren awoke with some dizziness on his head, he saw that he was in a big room, illuminated with some intense lights. He also could see some screens showing diagnostic, and some tools that you normally would see in a medical facility, 'I suppose I'm in some kind of medical room.' he thought.

He couldn't remember exactly what had happened to him for a few minutes. Then everything came back, the facility, the attack of the Guardians, that juggernaut Guardian, the massacre that the security team faced, the retreat, an explosion, getting to the camp site, and then nothing.

In that moment a Salarian Doctor entered the room. "Oh! I see that you are awake. Good, good. Feared that you hadn't resisted the operation." He said.

Saren only made an expression of confusion at this.

"Right, you wouldn't know. Tell me, what's the last thing that you remember?"

"Just that I arrived at the camp site after an engagement with the Guardians, and then nothing." Saren said while trying to remember if there is something more that he hadn't remembered yet.

"I see. After you arrived at the camp site you blacked out. Your body couldn't resist the fatigue and damage that you had suffered. You were transported aboard the _Eternal Light _for intense medical treatment."

"Intense medical treatment? How bad were my injuries?" Saren interrupted.

"You had 2 concussions, 3 broken ribs, of which one of them pierced a lung, and you had some internal organs damaged. Your armor was the only thing that managed to save you from that explosion. Without it I doubt that we would be having this conversation." The Doctor informed.

Saren swallowed. If he was that close to death, he didn't want to find out what would have been of him if that missile had made a direct impact. He then remembered the mention of an operation made on him, "Doctor you mentioned an operation, how was it?" he asked.

"A complete success. While we had to replace your internal organs and lung that were damaged with cybernetics, as well as the 2 broken fingers that you had, we managed to get you as you were before receiving any damage." The doctor informed.

"So am I ready to go, Doctor?"

"Yes. But if you feel anything strange, come see me, okay?"

"Of course."

"One more thing. The Captain wants to see you, once you are ready."

Saren only nodded, while changing to his clothes. 'I'll have to get a new armor.' Saren thought.

Saren got out of the infirmary in record time, not wanting to make the Captain wait too much for him. He traveled through the corridors of the ship towards the bridge on the upper level. Once Saren entered the bridge, he noticed that the crew inside the bridge was in a hurry. Working and moving from station to station to check some of their analysis. The crew was a controlled chaos of activity.

As he passed by the tactical screen, he saw the status of many teams that were on the ring, of which many were highlighted on green, while 1 was on yellow. 'We have a missing team down there?' Saren wondered.

"SPECTRE Arterius, good to see that you are alright." Captain Tristana greeted.

"Captain, I heard that you requested my presence." Saren said, trying to get to the point of this meeting.

"You are correct. I was informed that your diagnostics indicated that once you were awake you would be ready for action. Am I correct?"

"Affirmative Captain. What are your orders?"

"I'm sending you with the other 2 SPECTRES to search for the missing team." She informed.

"Missing team? How did that happen?"

"1 day ago, the Guardians that were protecting the facility where you were ambushed, left the area. We thought that it was some kind of trap to lure us in, so we sent some commandos and a gunship to secure the zone. Once it was deemed secure, the investigation team went there to try and open the doors of the facility. After opening them, we found some kind of bunker that extended at least a kilometer underground." Tristana informed.

"Let me guess, the investigation team went inside and after some time all communications were lost with them?" Saren inquired.

"Exactly what happened, at first we thought that it was interference due to the profundity of the bunker. But after hours without any kind of contact, we decided to send someone down there to assort the situation. We lost contact with him approximately 3 hours ago. Right now a team of commandos is going down there to see what happened. If they don't come

or report back 4 hours after their insertion, then you and your team will go down there to investigate."

"And if we don't come back in our given time frame?" Saren asked. It wasn't that he didn't trust his abilities, but an investigation and a possible commando team getting lost down there? That gave him a bad feeling.

"Then we will close all attempts of finding you guys, and that facility will be off limits until we know what's happening down there." Tristana said with a sad tone.

"Understood ma'am. I'll prepare my team for deployment in 5 hours."

Saren saluted and then left the bridge to find the other 2 SPECTRES that were accompanying him down there.

September 12, 2574, 0900 Hours, System Alliance Calendar, Deca-5 system, CAS-Class Assault Carrier **_Shadow of Intel_****.**

Fleet Master Rtas 'Vadum was currently on the bridge of his ship, watching the status of the rest of the Fleet of Glory Reclamation that now was being commanded by his Assault Carrier _Shadow of Intel_.

The fleet consisted of 8 SDV-Class corvettes, 10 Paris Heavy Frigates, 5 CPV-Class Heavy Destroyers, 5 UNSC Destroyers, 7 CCS-Class Battlecruisers, and now 1 CAS-Class Assault Carrier instead of the CSO-Class Super Carrier.

The fleet had just arrived at the system, ready to go through the relay escorting the representatives of the System Alliance at any moments notice.

"Lieutenant Sanders, contact the Heavy Destroyer _Esteem_ and be ready to send the signal to go through the relay at my word."

"Yes Admiral." Sanders replied. "_Esteem_ is on the line."

Rtas turned to the communications screen and there he saw Shipmaster 'Fulsamee of the _Esteem_. While the Heavy Destroyer wasn't

originally part of the Fleet of Glory Reclamation, it was requested by Rtas to accompany the rest of the fleet. Because of his experience with one race of the Citadel members, the suggestions and experience that the Shipmaster had were of high value in this situation.

"Fleet master." 'Fulsamee greeted.

"Shipmaster," Rtas greeted back, "any suggestions that you have concerning this relay and the Citadel species?" he asked.

"I'll suggest to go through the relay in 40% power in the reactors. That way they would not overheat and explode once we pass through the relay. Now concerning the Citadel, I suggest that once we are on the other side we make contact and inform them of our plans of travel to the Citadel. That way they would not suspect that we have any kind of hostile intentions against them." 'Fulsamee said.

"Very well shipmaster, in that case your ship is tasked to inform the Citadel ships of our plans."

'Fulsamee nodded and then cut the line to prepare his ship for the jump.

"Sanders inform the rest of the fleet to pass through the relay at 40% power on the reactors."

"Yes sir, message sent."

And with that Rtas watched as all the ships of his fleet moved towards the relay. Each one getting engulfed by an electric blue field of energy, which propelled them towards the void of space.

**September 12, 2172, 0857 Hours, Citadel Council Calendar, Voyager Cluster, Orbit around Pheiros, Turian Carrier
****_Predator_****.**

Admiral Desolas Arterius watched the ships that formed the diplomatic endeavor that was to escort the Alliance representatives' ships towards the Citadel. He honestly didn't know what exactly to expect from the System Alliance, but he was sure that they would send, at least, a small battle group escorting their representatives. 'If they are willing to send 5 ships over a kilometer long for just one drop ship, what can stop them of sending even bigger ships to escort their representatives.' Arterius thought.

"Admiral, I'm detecting incoming ships through the relay." Lieutenant Diforian informed.

"Put it on screen and be prepared to establish communications people."

"Yes sir." The crew responded.

Arterius turned to the main screen and watched as an entire fleet, consisting of 36 ships of different designs and sizes, appeared through the relay. But what really caught his attention, wasn't the quantity of ships that the Alliance had sent, no that was expected by the Turian, what really caught his attention was the monstrosity of a ship that the Alliance had sent. It was even bigger than the 7.8 ship

that he had seen 7 days ago, and he was sure that it was even more deadly than the last one. 'By the spirits! This people surely don't play around when they have to protect someone important.' Arterius thought with some resemblance of admiration and respect.

"Sir, the Alliance is hailing us." Junior Lieutenant Abrudas informed.

"Patch it through Lieutenant."

Arterius saw the familiar face of Shipmaster Orna 'Fulsamee on the communications screen.

"Admiral, a pleasure to see you again." Orna greeted.

"Likewise Shipmaster." Arterius greeted back, "I suppose that your fleet is ready to go to the Citadel?"

"Affirmative Admiral, though this is not my fleet. The Fleet master couldn't greet you personally because we are still integrating the necessary components to the rest of the fleet in order to establish communications with the Citadel ships. Though that problem should be solved before we arrive to the Citadel." Orna informed.

"I see. Well, if we part now we should arrive to the Citadel in approximately 5 hours." Arterius said.

"About that Admiral, I request that your ships situate in the middle of our fleet, and the ones that can dock in one of our ships do so. We are using a slipspace jump to arrive to the Citadel, it should take us about 2 hours." Orna informed.

"Slipspace jump?" Arterius asked a little confused.

"Our way of FTL travel Admiral." Orna clarified.

Arterius thought about this for a minute before nodding to the Shipmaster and ordering the rest of his ships to either dock in one of the Alliance's ships, or to situate in the middle of their fleet.

Once his ships were in position, Arterius sent word to the Shipmaster, informing him that he and his ships were ready to use this 'Slipspace' method that had been mentioned.

When the Shipmaster informed him that the fleet will be entering slipspace in 60 seconds, he really didn't know what to expect. Once the 60 seconds passed, he watched in astonishment as in front of every Alliance ship appeared some kind of portal, he even got more surprised when he saw that all the ships were moving towards said portal and entering to its mysteries. He ordered his ship and the Dreadnought, which was beside his ship, to follow the Alliance ship that was beside them through the portal.

Once his ship was inside the portal, he turned towards his systems officer, "Lieutenant Diforian, status report."

"Sir our shields decreased to 40%, it appears that the energy used to create that portal, affected our reactors, nothing critical, but enough to decrease the power levels. I'm even sure to say that, if it

wasn't for the shields of the Alliance ship that is beside us, which are now covering us, our ship would have been dead or destroyed inside this portal." Diforian reported.

"Interesting, Abrudas I want you to prepare a report to send it to the Council." Arterius ordered. 'They'll want to know about this ramifications.' Arterius thought before turning to the bridge.

****September 12, 2172, 1130 Hours, Citadel Council Calendar, Widow System, Asari Dreadnought ****_Destiny Ascension_**, **Citadel Defense Fleet.****

Captain Treeya, of the _Destiny Ascension_, watched as the crew of her ship worked on the different consoles around the bridge. While normally the crews of all the ships of the Citadel Defense Fleet would be less active, today wasn't one of those normal days.

The Defense fleet was informed 2 days ago that they were to expect the System Alliance representatives to arrive at the Citadel. But what Treeya didn't know was at what time to expect them, so that's why the crew was working in the multiple terminals in the bridge, all trying to locate any anomalies that signified the arrival of the System Alliance.

"Captain, I'm detecting some strange signatures in sector 5." The systems officer reported.

"What kind of signatures are we talking about officer?" Treeya asked.

"I'm reading an increase of gravitational force, as well as some kind of distortions around the entire sector."

"Inform the rest of the fleet, tell them to keep an eye in there, and to be on yellow alert." Treeya ordered.

"Yes Captain."

'I'm not liking the sound of this. Gravitational force increase in sector 5? Something is wrong here.' Treeya thought to herself.

"Captain! Multiple signatures forming in sector 5. They match to black holes signatures but smaller!" The systems officer said surprised.

"Someone put it on screen now!" Treeya said alarmed.

"It's on screen 1 Captain."

Treeya looked at the screen, which was focused on sector 5, and there she saw nothing at first, but after some seconds she watched in astonishment as 36 micro black holes formed. She even got more surprised when she saw that from every black hole a ship exited, every ship of different designs and sizes, and in the middle of the newly arrived fleet, there were 2 Turian vessels. And when she thought that nothing else could surprise her at this point, she saw on the screen that from the bigger vessel 5 more Turian ships exited what appeared to be the hangar of the ship.

'By the goddess! How did they managed to construct ships of those magnitudes? Not even the Protheans managed to construct ships of half the size of that super Dreadnought!' Treeya thought.

"Captain the bigger ship is hailing us." The Lieutenant managing communications informed.

"Patch it through Lieutenant."

Treeya looked at the main communications screen, there she saw what she identified as a Sangheili, and she also noticed part of the bridge of the ship and could see at least another 3 different races on the bridge. She could identify a Human, which like the reports said, they looked at some point like an Asari, she also identified an Unggoy because of their similar appearance to the Volus, the third race she couldn't identify, but they appeared like some kind of giant insects.

"Greetings, I'm Fleet Master Rtas 'Vadum of the fleet of Glory Reclamation. My fleet is here to stablsh relationships with the Citadel Council. Do we have authorization to dock in the Citadel?"

After getting out of her shock the Captain responded, "Greetings and welcome to the Citadel, I'm Captain Treeya aboard the _Destiny Ascension_. You have permission to send one ship and dock on the Citadel, the rest of your fleet is to stay at your current position."

"Understood." Rtas said before disconnecting the line.

'That the goddess bless us all, and that this goes well.' Treeya thought.

September 12, 2574, 1140 Hours, Citadel Council Calendar, Widow System, **CAS-Class Assault Carrier ****_Shadow of Intel_****.**

"Sanders, send message to the fleet. Tell them to stay in position, also tell Shipmaster 'Fulsamee that he is to board my ship, he is accompanying us." Rtas ordered.

"Message sent Fleet Master." Sanders replied.

"Pilot once Shipmaster 'Fulsamee docks on the ship, start moving towards the Citadel."

"Affirmative Fleet Master."

"I want a Spirit Drop Ship ready for deployment." Rtas ordered.

Once the Phantom transporting Shipmaster 'Fulsamee docked on the hangar of the _Shadow of Intel_, the Assault Carrier started to move towards the Citadel.

September 12, 2172, 1200 Hours, Citadel Council Calendar, Widow System, Citadel Station, Dock 17.

[Here Citadel NewsNet with Valera Nera. 30 minutes ago an entire

fleet of unknown ships arrived in the system. When the Council was asked about it they negated to answer any kind of questions regarding the new arrivalsâ€¦]

Garrus Vakarian turned off from the news to continue waiting for the representatives of the System Alliance. He like the rest of C-Sec, were informed by the Council about the arrival of the System Alliance. They were tasked to welcome them to the Citadel and to take them towards the Presidium where a session was to be held in order to establish relationships between both governments.

He was currently on the docking bay D18, overseeing the security team that was to escort the Alliance members towards the presidium, and to scare any bystanders that were wondering around, specially the newshound kind of bystanders.

Currently the situation was under control, no one that wasn't supposed to be here was, and so far nothing had gone wrong in the station. Garrus then heard a humming sound that was increasing as time passed by, he looked through his binoculars towards the direction of the sound. There he saw some kind of drop ship with the shape of an ark, in a horizontal position moving towards the docking bay. It was being escorted by 4 smaller ships, which he guessed were some kind of fighters.

"Okay people, prepare to welcome the Alliance, they have arrived." Garrus informed the rest of the team.

2 minutes later, the ark shaped ship docked on the Citadel. Garrus watched as the ship just floated about 1 meter from the floor before opening 2 doors on the sides of the ship. From both sides 8 individuals exited from the ship. He noticed that 12 of the 16 individuals that exited were the security team. 6 he recognized as Sangheili warriors, each of them wearing a red with gold armor, carrying some kind of spear and some kind of rifle attached to their tight. The other 6 members of the security team, he guessed that were humans based on their physical forms, all of them were covered in a thick black armor, wearing helmets, and carrying an assault rifle of some kind and a pistol.

'Probably some kind of commando team.' Garrus thought.

When all of them exited off of the drop ship, the 16 individuals took a standard formation around their VIPs. Garrus moved towards the front to greet them, and he was met with 3 rifles aiming at him.

He tensed for a moment before realizing that the view of an unknown approaching to the representatives with a gun in hand was a signal to aim your weapon at it. Garrus put the gun in his back, letting the guards know that he wasn't hostile before saying, "Welcome to the Citadel, I'm Garrus Vakarian of Citadel Security or C-Sec for short."

At hearing this, the 3 humans aiming their guns at him relaxed, and lowered their weapons.

"Thanks for the welcome officer, I'm Uptar, the Vice-President of the System Alliance." He introduced himself while the other three representatives opted for nodding at him instead.

"Vice-President, if you and the rest of your group could follow me towards the presidium. There's a session being held there for the negotiations of relationships between our mutual governments." Garrus said.

"Lead the way officer." Uptar responded.

Garrus nodded and signaled the rest of the security team to escort the Alliance towards the presidium. During the travel, Garrus and some members of C-Sec, signaled some point of interest on the Citadel, many of which represented a cultural significance towards the various species aboard the station.

Once they all got to the Presidium level, C-Sec and the Alliance representatives couldn't evade any more the press of the news. C-sec and the Alliance's escorts acted immediately, blocking the newshounds and opening a path for the representatives.

After 10 minutes of traveling through an organic blockade of news reporters and photographers, that in Garrus's opinion they were even worse than a Geth assault group, they managed to arrive at the checkpoint before the chamber where the session was to be held.

"I'll have to request that you leave your weapons at this point, if you are planning on entering with the representatives and the Council." Garrus informed to the security team of the Alliance.

"Sergeant, I want you and one other ODST to accompany us, as well as 3 honor guards." Rtas ordered.

The Sergeant nodded and picked another ODST as well as 3 Honor Guards. All of them leaving their weapons to their comrades. After that all of the 9 members that were going inside the chamber passed through a holographic scan before entering.

No one of C-Sec noticed nor detected the M6G-b pistol that the 5 security members had with them. Those pistols were a new sub-design of the M6G, designated by ONI, it was undetectable by any kind of scan and was designed for discrete insertions and rapid use of the individual that carried it.

Once Rtas, Uptar, Qunu, and Matt entered the chamber, they noticed that there were already some C-Sec officials guarding the 3 members of the Council. The 2 ODSTs took position by the door while the 3 Honor Guards situated themselves behind the representatives of the Alliance.

"Welcome to the Citadel, I hope that your stay aboard has been pleasant so far. I'm Councilor Tevos, representing the Asari Republic."

"Greetings, I'm Councilor Valern. I speak for the Salarian Union."

"And I'm Councilor Sparatus, I represent the Turian Hierarchy. I want to thank you for the assistance that the System Alliance provided on the Voyager Cluster."

"It was no trouble at all Councilor, we are glad that we could help."

I'm Uptar, the Vice-President of the System Alliance."

"I'm Fleet Master Rtas 'Vadum of the fleet of Glory Reclamation." He announced without informing them that he wasn't the real commanding officer of the fleet.

"I'm Shipmaster Qunu 'Fulsamee of the Heavy Destroyer _Esteem_."

"And I'm Matt Rogers." He said without a trace of emotion. Like any other member of ONI he was trained to analyze every situation that presented to him, and right now keeping the existence of ONI was a huge advantage in the playing field.

"Now that the introductions are over, maybe we should get to know our government better, after all, if we are going to establish relationships between us we need to know about the other first, don't you think so?" Tevos asked.

"I agree with your reasoning Councilor, I think that a brief history lesson would benefit us all. But first." Uptar said before nodding towards Matt.

Matt took out from one of his pockets a circular device that emitted a bright blue light. The Councilors watched with curiosity as Matt put said device in the floor before pressing some buttons. Matt then retired himself from the device, and then the holographic appearance of a human AI, that resembled a pilot from the 1970s, appeared before the eyes of a surprised and a little bit alarmed Council.

"Greetings Councilors, I'm a generation 6 military AI, service number N34759003A, also known as Jeff." Jeff introduced himself.

After getting out of their surprise, Valern asked, "I believe that we have never encountered an AI such as yourself. If I may ask, how did the Alliance managed to create an AI that resembles organic life almost as perfectly?"

"That kind of information can be shared after relationships between our governments are established councilor." Matt said.

"Right, right you are. In that case I believe that we were about to inform about our history Vice-President?" Valern asked, while Sparatus watched the different expressions of the Alliance representatives.

"Jeff if you may?" Uptar said.

"Yes Vice-President. Now Councilors, the System Alliance was formed in the year 2560 after an attack on the Human home world known as Earth by Loyalist Covenant factions. Previous to the attack, both, the United Earth Government or UEG, their military branch the United Nations Space Command or UNSC, and the Separatist Covenant, were having a session to organize a relationship between both factions. After the Loyalist attacked Earth with a fleet of 268 ships, both the Separatist and the UEG and UNSC realized that an Alliance would benefit both factions, not only on protection, economy, and military power, but also would help them both to be more prepared against all the situations that the mystery of space could throw at them. Thus the System Alliance was formed. During the last 12 years, the System

Alliance fortified their borders and expanded their space, as well as terraforming the planets that were lost during the Human-Covenant War." Jeff explained.

"Separatist Covenant and Loyalist Covenant? Where both factions a singular one in the past? And what about this Human-Covenant war? Was it that bad that you needed to terraform various planets?" Tevos asked with curiosity and some trace of fear. 'If the System Alliance had to terraform several of their planets; that means that this Human-Covenant war was a really bad one for both sides.' Or at least that's what Tevos thought.

"The Covenant was formed thousands of years before Humanity encountered them. They were a religious government formed by 8 different species: the San 'shyum, the Sangheili, the Jiralhanae, the Kig-Yar, the Yanme'e, the Unggoy, the Lekgolo, and the Huragok. When the Covenant made contact with Humanity in 2525, it signified the start of a war for survival for the Humans. During 27 years the UEG and UNSC lost planet by planet against the Covenant forces, some of them were devoted of all kind of life because of nuclear bombardment or glassing. In the final months of the war, the Covenant had found Earth, the last remaining Inner Planet with Human population, it would have signified our loss against the Covenant if it wasn't for the civil war that happened inside their ranks. Fleet Master would you mind to explain such events." Jeff asked.

Rtas nodded and then explained, "During the initial attack on Earth, many members of the Covenant found that we had been lied to by the San 'Shyum, in order to exterminate the Humans. Once we found out the truth, over half of the entire Covenant deflected from their ranks and we formed the Separatist Covenant. After the separation was declared official, we aided the Humans against the Loyalist Covenant, managing to push them back and eventually defeating them."

At hearing this, the Councilors couldn't hide their surprise about the massacre of a war that the Humans fought. Tevos was concerned about the use of nuclear weaponry during the war, and while she didn't know what the Alliance referred to glassing, she knew that it couldn't be any better than a nuclear bombardment of a planet.

Valern was thinking of the technological capabilities of both the Covenant and Humans during said war. If both factions had the potential to devoid a planet of life by themselves, now it was almost sure that they could do it to an entire system.

Meanwhile Sparatus' military mind was analyzing all the information that he had heard so far. It was obvious to him that the Humans had the disadvantage on that war. Also he had to give them credit, to fight and survive a war, against all odds, by themselves, against an alliance of 8 different alien races, for 27 years. It was obvious that the Humans were great warriors and well versed in the art of war to him.

"Was it really necessary the use of nuclear weapons? And what is this glassing that you mentioned? How many planets were lost because of those causes?" Tevos broke the silence, expressing her worries about that disastrous war.

"The use of nuclear weaponry was the only thing that put Humanity in

an even playing field against the Covenant. Glassing was the term that we gave to the complete bombardment of a planet by plasma, leaving the entire surface of the planet in a glass like substance, destroying the atmosphere and evaporating all the water masses on the surface. Humanity lost over 200 planets to glassing, and over 100 by nuclear bombardment." Matt informed, disguising his internal emotions of that painful memories.

"By the goddess!" Was all that Tevos could said.

"While that was a considerably loss, right now 70% of all those planets are back to their pre-war status, while 20% are currently in the terraforming process, and the other 10% it's still inhabitable." Jeff reassured them.

"Now Councilor I believe that is your turn to share some of your history." Uptar said, breaking the thick silence that the chamber had.

"Right." Tevos said, putting her thoughts about the history of the Alliance to the side. "Around 580 BCE the Asari Republic found the relay network. After exploring it we found the Citadel Station. Years after colonizing the station, the Salarian Union found the Citadel around 520 BCE, and thus we formed the first Citadel Council. Eventually, the Volus found the Citadel, and after relationships were stablished, they stablished a standard galactic currency. During the following years we made contact with the Quarians, Batarians, Helcor, and Hanar.

Some years later we made contact with the Rachni, the first contact with them resulted in a war that lasted for 300 years. If it wasn't for the discovery of the Krogan, that war would have lasted even more. Once the Rachni were declared extinct, the Krogan rebellions arrived. After fighting them for years we made contact with the Turians who then helped us to stop the Krogan by using a biochemical weapon known as the genophage.

Once the rebellion ended, the Council granted a sit to the Turians in recognition for their services. By 1895 the Geth war commenced, they rebelled against their creators the Quarians. The Council in turn expelled them of the Citadel and some years after they were exiled of their planet by the Geth. Some decades later we made contact with the Drell and later on we made contact with your government." Tevos concluded.

When the Tevos finished explaining the history of the Citadel Government, the Alliance's representatives were, in some cases, in a state of shock, while others were more analytical in the situation.

'If what the Councilor said about the Rachni war, then that means that they war was in the same level as the Human-Covenant war. Also their willingness to exterminate an entire violent race in nature, shows that they are determined to protect the ones that are innocent.' Uptar thought.

'I'll have to gather more information on this genophage. That way if the CItadel tries to use it against us, we will be prepared for it.' Matt thought.

"Very well Councilors, now that we have some basic knowledge of our histories, I think that is time for the real negotiations to start." Uptar said.

"I think that would be appropriate. If you are to establish relationships with the Citadel, some requests will have to be made to the System Alliance." Valern said.

"And what would those requests be? Councilors." Matt asked.

"For starters, the use of AIs on Citadel space is prohibited. Regardless we are willing to let you explain the reasons for which you use and need the AIs, as well as a guaranty that they are safe for the rest of the organic population of the galaxy. If the reasons are good enough then we will permit the use of them with a probation period of time of about 6 years. If nothing happens in that time then we will not have any kind of problems with their presence." Valern stated.

"I see. And the rest of the requests?" Matt said.

"Because of the treaty of Farixen, the Alliance will have to cut the number of Dreadnoughts that they'll have on the Citadel space to a ratio of 5:3." Tevos said.

"And what is the size of one of your Dreadnoughts Councilor?" Rtas asked.

"That would be, between 1.2 Km to 2.5 Km long." Tevos informed.

"Any other request that we need to be aware of?" Matt asked.

"Yes. Last but not least, the use of weapons of mass destruction on garden worlds are banned on all Citadel Space. If the Alliance breaks this law without a really good reason, and without informing us before the use of it, then it will be considered as an act of war." Valern said.

"I see. In that case Councilors we will have to decline to your second request." Uptar said.

"Any particular reason Vice-President?." Tevos asked.

"If we were to send only ships to any part of the Citadel Space that are between those sizes, then we could only have Corvettes, Frigates and some Destroyers in your space." Rtas said, watching as the Councilors realized that the Alliance's fleet was composed of various ships that were even bigger than a Dreadnought.

"In that case, we would like to have the sizes of the different categories and classes of the ships that the Alliance have in order to modify the Treaty of Farixen to suit our request." Sparatus said.

"That can be arranged, Jeff if you could send them that information." Matt said.

"Yes sir, sending it now." Jeff responded.

Once Jeff sended the information to the councilors, their Omni tools

marked that the message had been received.

"Thanks, once we modify the treaty, we will inform the Alliance of the number of military ships that can be present on the Citadel Space in case you decide to colonize a world within our borders." Tevos said.

"Thanks. Now the Alliance is willing to make trades of materials with the Citadel as well as share some of our communications, medical technology, and the basics of our methods of FTL." Matt said. "In exchange we want the same trade of minerals, especially Titanium and Vanadium. We also want a free trade route for commerce uses only, as well as information regarding the relay network."

"That can be arranged. Also no military vessels will pass through both our borders, unless it has authorization. I suggest that a checkpoint is made in the Voyager Cluster." Sparatus said.

"Very well Councilor." Uptar said. "Also, the Citadel is welcome to establish an embassy on the capital of the Alliance, but because of security measures, its location will be kept secret and transportation from and to will be provided by the System Alliance."

The Councilors looked at each other for a moment, mentally discussing the implications of that offer. At last they all nodded and Tevos said, "That would be acceptable, in exchange an embassy will be opened for the System Alliance on the Citadel, but transportation to and from will be only permitted in a civilian vessel unless there is some kind of emergency."

"Thank you Councilors. I think this will be all for the moment. Now if you excuse us, we have some important matters to attend." Uptar said.

"Understood Vice-President, have a good day." Tevos said.

Once the Alliance's representatives exited the Council chamber, the Councilors turned to each other.

"Well, that went better than expected." Sparatus said.

"I can agree with that Sparatus." Tevos said.

"The System Alliance surely can be a threat to the Citadel if we don't act cautiously with them." Valern stated.

"You are right Valern. We should prepare for the worst case scenario. I suggest that you pull back the STG ships that are still on route towards the System Alliance's space." Sparatus said.

"But why would I do that? The information that we could gather would be of high importance." Valern said with confusion.

"Because, you don't just survive a war of survival for 27 years against an enemy that has all the advantages, if your spy and intelligence network is deficient." Sparatus said.

"You don't really believe that their tale of that Human-Covenant war was true? Do you Sparatus?" Tevos asked.

"Believe me Tevos, even if I didn't wanted to, I would still believe it. I saw it in the eyes of them, they were filled with regret and sadness only seen after a disastrous battle. And if the Humans managed to survive said war by themselves, then we shouldn't underestimate them. Especially now that they have allies, who knows what they are really capable of." Sparatus explained.

"In that case, we need to act discretely, fast, and with precision if we want to find out their true capabilities." Tevos said, surprising Valern and Sparatus in the process.

"Then I'll order the STGs to abort the mission and wait for a window of opportunity." Valern said.

"Now that that is solved, what are the latest reports on the Big Ring?" Sparatus asked.

"We can't tell. We lost contact with them 6 hours ago." Valern informed.

"Did you send a ship already to investigate?" Sparatus asked.

"Yes but it will take another 8 hours to reach the location. Apparently there's something blocking communications in the entire system. We aren't sure of what exactly it is, but once the ship arrives we'll find out."

Sparatus nodded and then left the chamber. Tevos wasn't far behind him, but Valern stayed a little longer. 'Could this be related somehow with the arrival of the System Alliance?' He thought to himself before leaving to his quarters.

****September 12, 2172, 0030 Hours, Citadel Council Calendar,**** 11 hours before Citadel & System Alliance Relationship Talks, ****Beta-Prometheus System, Surface of the Big Ring. ****

Saren was currently outside the entrance to the facility were he and his security team had been ambushed. He wasn't alone in there, Thane Krios, the newest member of the SPECTRES, was with him, as well as the SPECTRE Reena T'nol.

They had been informed that the commando team had been reported MIA. And just when they received the disastrous news, they immediately set foot in the command center that was stablished outside the facility.

"Lieutenant, any intel on what's the situation down there?" Saren asked.

"Negative. We lost signal with both the Scientific and Commando teams once they got past 50 meters down side."

"So we basically are blind down there?" Saren asked with an incredulous tone.

"Not at all agent, before we sent the teams we deployed a pair of drones to map the facility, strangely they are still transmitting."

'Well, at least we won't get lost down there.' Saren thought.
"Transfer the map to my Omni tool Lieutenant, and also mark the last point of communication of both teams."

"Affirmative. Transferring data."

"Also, if we don't report back in 5 hours, quarantine this zone. Understood?"

"Yes sir."

Saren nodded and then turned towards the entrance again. He saw that both Thane and Reena were already equipped and ready to go. Thane had with him a pair of Predator Pistols, as well as a Scimmar Shotgun. Reena had opted to take instead an M-77 Paladin Pistol and a Disiple Shotgun. Saren had stuck with his Phaeston Assault Rifle and a pair of M-6 Carnifex pistols.

"Okay people let's move!" Saren commanded.

The other two SPECTRES nodded and followed Saren inside the facility. They arrived at a big room that had two walls surrounding a gravitational elevator. After checking that the room was clear, Thane went to the main console of the elevator and activate it.

"Okay, once the elevator stops use only radio contact. If something else is down there besides the Scientific and Commando teams, we don't want to make it aware of our presence. Understood?"

"Affirmative." Both SPECTRES said.

Saren nodded at them and turned to wait for the elevator to finish it's descend. During the wait Saren noted that he was getting static from the long range communicators, 'hmm maybe the materials used to construct this facility are causing the interference.' He thought.

When the elevator finished it's descend, the 3 SPECTRES immediately secured the room. Once the area was declared clear, they made their way towards a corridor on the south side. They entered another room, this one had three doors, all going in different directions, but only one of them was unlocked.

[It is unusually quiet down here. I feel like we are approaching some kind of trap.] Thane commented.

[Yea, it feels like we are being observed. Almost as if someone or something was studying us.] Reena said.

[Focus people. We have two teams missing down here.] Saren said.

They continued through the door, but once they entered the other side they were surprised by what they found.

[What happened in here?] Reena voiced the thoughts of everyone present.

On the room you could see some blackened areas on the walls, in some

of them were even marks of dried blood. They also noticed the strange brown like substance falling from the walls and ceiling. But they didn't found any kind of bodies on the area.

[Hmâ€¦ It looks like some kind of firefight occurred here. Whatever it was that attacked the commandos managed to push them towards the next room.] Thane said, while analyzing the bullet holes on the walls.

[What makes you think that Thane? The Commandos are one of the best infantry that there is on all Citadel Space.] Saren said.

[The bullet holes on the walls, I have seen this before on several of my past assassinations jobs. When a group is scared or confused and try to retreat from an unidentified enemy or a force with more numbers, they tend to fire randomly in hopes of hitting and distracting the enemy long enough to retreat and regroup.] Thane explained.

[I see, but what could have managed to have such effect on a Commando team?] Saren thought out loud.

[Sir? The strange substance falling from the ceiling, it's organic.] Reena informed.

[Organic?] Saren said with a raised eyebrow.

[Affirmative. Whatever it was that attacked the Commandos, was organic.]

[Then we aren't alone down here, be careful and ready to shot anything that isn't the Scientific or Commando team.]

After hearing that all of them readied their weapons, ready to fire at a moment notice. They moved towards the door covered in dried blood, when they opened it, they noticed that they were on the upper floor of the room. And crossing through the room was some kind of bridge made of light.

[Sir? What's that on the other side?] Reena asked.

Saren looked through the scope of his rifle and immediately tensed a little.

[One of the Commandos.]

They hurried through the bridge, but before they finished crossing it they heard a scratching sound, and then, nothing.

[Did you two heard that?] Saren asked.

[Yea. It sounded like it was on the room where we came from.] Thane said.

[Yea. Thane go and check the room, if you see anything call us immediately, Reena you are with me. Let's check that body.]

Thane nodded and moved towards the room where they had come from, while Saren and Reena moved towards the dead Commando.

[Reena can you tell me the cause of the dead?]

[Hmmâ€¦| analysis indicate that the wound on her stomach was the primary cause of dead. It appears that she lost too much blood, and really fast. Also I'm detecting several bones broken.]

[What caused the wound?] Saren sasked curiously.

[Some kind of sharp weapon, the cut is clean and it was in one hit. Probably some kind of spear or sword.]

[I don't think that an enemy using spears and swords could push back an armed Commando team Reena.]

[Well then see for yourself. The wound is too clean and precise to indicate any kind of fire weapon. The only weapons capable of doing damage like this are either a sword or a spear. A very thick spear or sword because it cut through the armor like if it wasn't there.]

'The answers only give base to more questions.' Saren thought.
[Understood Reena. Thane how's the situation in the room?]

[Clean sir. Not a trace of anything new on here. It's almost as if we were in a ghost town.]

[Got it, come to my position, we are moving ahead.]

[Affirmative.]

Saren turned to look back at the dead body, the expression of terror still present on the Commando's face, 'We are missing something.' He thought. Saren looked around, looking for the Omni tool of the commando, but he didn't found anything.

Once Thane regrouped with them, they started moving towards the next room. There they found more signals of battle, also in the middle was some kind of crystal camera, bridges going around it, some with still active consoles and others were destroyed.

[Some kind of observational room perhaps?] Thane asked.

[Totally, the way the room is set up, and the central crystal room suggest that whoever constructed this place, was studding something.]
Reena said.

[Let's keep moving, if we are lucky we'll find what exactly happened down here.]

Saren looked around the room and noticed that there were 2 doors unlocked. He checked the map on his Omni tool before signaling to go through the left. They entered to a corridor with some tubes running through the middle of it until turning upwards and continuing through the facility.

Once they got to the next room, they could see again a bath of blood and 2 more bodies.

[Reena check those bodies. Thane find out what exactly happened here,

I'll secure the place.]

They nodded before turning to do as they were ordered. Saren took a look at the rest of the room, spotting nothing that shouldn't be here besides the blood and the bodies. When he returned to his initial position he saw Reena with a worried expression on her face.

[It's something wrong Reena?] Saren asked.

[Yes sir... The bodiesâ€ they are infected with some kind of substance. I can't tell what it is, but I know that whatever it is, it was the reason that killed them. Also the Scientist signals state that he has more exposure to the substance.]

[Was some kind of gas that killed them?] Saren wondered.

[Negative, whatever it is, it's alive at some level sir. It's organic in nature.]

[Like a parasite?] Saren asked confused.

[No not like a parasite, at least not the type that I know of.]

[Hmm put a beacon on here, we are taking the body for further analyzing once weâ€]

[Sir you'll want to see this.] Thane interrupted.

Saren looked towards Thane's position and saw that he was looking inside a corridor that went underground, right in the middle of the room. He indicated Reena to come with him. When both arrived at Thane's position, they immediately saw what Thane had found. In the corridor were the bodies of the scientist as well as the same brown liquid and multiple yellow-brown spikes. Most of them implanted on the scientists bodies.

[Reena, analyze those spikes, Thane what can you tell me about what happened here?]

Reena immediately went to the closest dead body, pulling out her Omni tool, scanning the spike and taking some samples.

[The evidence on the room suggest that the scientists were cornered on this corridor. Got shot by both sides. They all died at least 8 hours ago.] Thane said.

[And the marks of bullets on the walls?]

[The Commando team, when they got to this location. Probably saw the massacre on the corridor and started to investigate it, before turning back the way they came. That means that, when they were attacked, they were coming towards the surface, got pinned down and forced to retreat to this location. If we want to find out what happened to them, then I suggest to go through that door] Thane said, pointing in the end towards a door in the middle of the corridor.

Saren nodded at him and then turned towards Reena, [Reena what did you found?]

[The spikes are made of a dense material. Organic in nature also, but dense as the armor covering our ships and also really flexible.]

[So we basically know that some living creature, that uses primitive and organic weapons, killed the science team and some commandos. We are missing something here.]

No one said anything after that, they all were wondering what creature could cause such damage and destruction, using only primitive basic weapons. They decided that moving was the best option to find the answers, so they moved towards the door on the corridor.

Once they opened the door, they found 5 more bodies. 2 of them were killed like the rest of the bodies that they had found, but the other 3 had impacts of bullets from their own weapons.

[Friendly fire probably?] Thane asked.

[Perhaps. They were on alert on this room, ready to attack whatever it was that came through this door. But the attackers were already inside the room, they probably managed to confuse the commandos and in the confusion they fired at each other, thinking that it was the enemy. Or maybe something more sinister happened here.]

[Sir more signatures of that organic parasite on the 3 bodies killed by our weapons.] Reena informed.

After hearing this, Saren's eyes widened in surprise. He had finally solved some part of this big puzzle.

[The Commandos killed by our weapons. They were fired at in purpose, it wasn't an accident. Something here was infecting the commandos and scientist, the Commandos figured that out. But why kill them, was this infection lethal to them too, even if they weren't infected? Or was it something else?]

[Sir I'm picking 1 contact coming towards our position from that direction.] Thane said while indicating the door in the other side of the room.

[Ready your weapons, if it isn't a scientist or a commando kill it.]

Thane and Reena nodded and then the 3 of them waited a few seconds before the door opened with a hiss. There in the doorway stood a surviving Commando, wounded and probably on its last minutes of life.

[Come on lets help her!] Saren said.

"Hey are you okay?" Reena asked while helping the Commando to sit down.

"Scientists search team monsters killed them all OH! Please don't let them take me too!" The commando said.

"She's delirious. Probably has a trauma caused by what happened here." Reena said.

"Hey!" Saren said, managing to gain the Commando's attention. "Tell us what happened here? What monsters are you talking about?"

For a moment reason seemed to return to the Commando, and she answered in a whisper, as if afraid that someone else might hear her. "Weâ€|we were looking for the scientists on here. Whe-en we found out that they were all dead, we decided to take a body for an autopsy. Inâ€|in our way to the surface we were ambushed by this mo-mo-monsters. They just attacked us, our weapons had little to no effect against them. Only shotguns or heavy pistols seemed to work. We were forced to retreat to that room" she said while pointing to the room from which she came from. "But they were already waiting for us, they started to kill us all, they even managed to turn some of us against us after being implanted by one of the monsters. I-I-I just stood there, watching as everything happened. And then nothing, I woke up wounded, I triedâ€| tried toâ€|" And whatever else she tried to say would never be known, because at that moment she died by her wounds.

[Damn!] Saren said, anger in his voice after hearing the delirious Commando, [We better get back to the surface, warn the rest of the fleet. If what she said is true, then we may have freed a parasitic species of some kind.]

[Understood.]

They all prepared themselves to leave, Thane pulled out his Scimmar Shotgun, activating incendiary ammo on it. Reena took her Disiple and activated the warp ammo mode on it. Saren opted to use his 2 Carnifex pistols, activating incendiary ammo in one and in the other used explosive ammo. If what the Commando said about the ineffectiveness of their assault rifles was true, then he didn't want to risk it in case they encountered this parasites on their way out.

[Sir I'm picking multiple contacts coming from the west, east and south rooms.] Thane informed.

[Okay people, prepare yourselves. We are getting out of here NOW, cover each other and don't separate.] Saren ordered.

The 2 other SPECTRES nodded at that, Reena ready to use her biotic abilities to help her two companions, while Thane and Saren aimed to the doors. In short all of them were ready to take on the incoming firefight.

****A/N:** I know that you guys are probably hating me right now for this cliff hanger hehe. But honestly it's fun when you do it to someone else haha xD you should try it. Our first glimpse with the Master Chief Yay! Don't worry you will see more of him in the incoming chapters. Okay now Thane a SPECTRE, yea I know that it doesn't seem right in a way, but the SPECTRES are formed by the best there is that each race can offer, and Thane is one of the bests assassin and analyst of situations that there is. The negotiations between the Alliance and the Citadel I know that they looked more like a history class but honestly I couldn't come with anything else that suited my purposes. Also the codex has been updated, Nothing mayor just some extra additions to the characters and ships. ******

****Now** any similarities between this chapter and any other fanfiction that you have read and the Halo game, the credit goes to all their

respective authors. Until the next chapter and REVIEW!**

5. Outbreak

The Next Great Journey

**A/N: And I'm back with another chapter. Thanks to everyone who have read this story so far, and also to the ones that reviewed this.
**

**Also the negotiations part on chapter 4 has been edited (It was like 2 hours after I post the chapter), the end result is slightly the same. Either way, if you hadn't read it yet I recommend to at least read again that part to better get a hold of how the situation at hand is going on the story. **

Now onto the chapter.

Speaking

'**Thoughts**'

[Radio Communications, Ground forces-Ground forces, and Ship-Ship]

{Ground to Ship Communications}

**Flash back of previous chapter(s) **

Disclaimer: I don't own Halo or Mass Effect both belong to their perspective owners. Any similarities between this chapter, Halo 1 and 2, and Halo The Flood belong to their respective authors.

Chapter 5: Outbreak

September 12, 2172, 0230 Hours, Citadel Council Calendar,** 9 hours before Citadel & System Alliance Relationship Talks,****Beta-Prometheus System, Inside Containment Facility on the Big Ring. **

[Sir I'm picking multiple contacts coming from the west, east and south rooms.] Thane informed.

[Okay people, prepare yourselves. We are getting out of here NOW, cover each other and don't separate.] Saren ordered.

The 2 other SPECTRES nodded at that, Reena ready to use her biotic abilities to help her two companions, while Thane and Saren aimed at the doors. In short all of them were ready to take on the incoming firefight.

The sound of trying to forcibly open a door could be heard on the room. Thane and Saren focused their sights on the doors from which the sounds came from, but then the sounds suddenly stopped.

[Do you think that they left?] Reena asked.

[No. They are planning something, probably a way to distract us?] Saren wondered.

[Do you heard that?] Thane suddenly asked.

That called the attention of Reena and Saren, both focused more on their senses and in did they could hear something. 'It sounds like something is moving through the room.' Saren realized.

He turned around and saw that his speculations were confirmed. There on the wall was what looked like some kind of gigantic arachnid, and it was contracting on itself, changing its form to that of some kind of turret.

[Behind us!] Saren warned, but it was too late already. Once Thane and Reena turned to fire, the doors were thrown inside the room. Dozens if not hundreds of small rounded forms swarmed through the room towards them while the spider like turret opened fire on them.

Reena immediately created a barrier, protecting her and the other 2 SPECTRES while Saren concentrated fire on the arachnid turret and Thane focused on the small rounded things.

Saren immediately noted that the arachnid being was vulnerable to incendiary rounds, especially when mixed with explosive rounds. It didn't took him even an entire thermal clip from his pistols to kill the thing, but now the rounded things had becommmed a bigger problem. Every time that either Thane or Saren killed one of them, 10 more appeared to take their place.

[We have to get out. Reena I want you to use shockwave towards the closest door, that'll give us enough time to get out of the room.] Saren ordered.

Reena nodded before letting her barrier fall in order to use shockwave. She concentrated her energy, which was already weakened by the multiple attacks by the rounded creatures. Once she got the energy required she let go a shockwave concentrated more on distance than in pure power force towards the left door.

[Let's go.] Saren said.

All of them ran towards the door, while shooting towards the swarm of enemies. Once they got inside the other room, Reena used her biotics to close the door using the debris inside the room.

[That'll gives us enough time to plan something.] Reena said.

[What where those things?] Thane asked.

[I don't know, probably the monsters that the Commando mentioned. It really doesn't matter right now, what it does matter is how to get out of this bunker.] Saren said as he observed the room, looking for any kind of exit besides the one they had come from.

[Over there, on the upper level. There's an open door.] Thane said having caught on what Saren was looking for.

[But how do we get up there, there aren't any stairs or elevators down here.] Reena pointed out.

[Hmm, Thane if you give me an impulse to get up there, I can help the both of you to get up.] Saren said.

Thane nodded and was positioning himself to help Saren but then the blocked door was thrown inside. Immediately dozens of the rounded things started entering, but this time they were accompanied by another bigger beings that resembled the Asari commandos and the scientific team, some of them even had weapons.

[Take cover!] Saren said.

Immediately the 3 SPECTRES took cover behind some pillars and started opening fire on everything that moved towards them. Reena used warp on one of the mutated Commandos, but to her utter horror and surprise, she found out that the thing was practically immune to it, even when it didn't had any kind of kinetic barriers or shields.

Thane wasn't fairing any better either, he was concentrating his shotgun fire on the rounded things keeping them at bay but it was turning difficult as time went by.

Saren, like Thane had just found out just how difficult it was to keep the hostiles at bay. 'This things are practically immune to most of our weaponry! We need to do something before it's too late.' He thought. After a few more seconds Saren had come with an idea. [Reena! I want you to form a singularity in the middle of those things. I'm going to throw a grenade at it, when it gets in range of the singularity I want you to detonate it with warp, shockwave, or whatever.] Saren Ordered.

Reena nodded and then formed a singularity, which immediately started to levitate the hostiles and destroying the rounded ones. Saren took out an incendiary grenade, activating it in the process. He immediately made the necessary calculations before throwing it at the singularity.

Saren watched it, feeling as time slowed down around him. When he looked back towards the enemy, he noticed that one of the mutated doctors was closing the distance between them. He activated his Omni Blade, ready to take the enemy head on, but just as he was ready to strike, the singularity and the grenade detonated, killing most of the enemies on the room and also throwing him and the infected doctor to the floor. The infected doctor recovered faster than Saren, immediately launching itself towards the downed SPECTRE ready to strike for the kill, but in the last moment it was killed by 3 Shotgun shots from Thane.

[Are you okay Sir?] Thane asked.

[Affirmative. Thanks for the save, now let's get out of here before more of those things arrive.]

Thane and Reena nodded, preparing themselves to get to the second floor of the room. When the 3 of them got to the second level, Saren immediately took point. He opened the unlocked door that lead them through a long corridor towards what they hopped was the elevator room. When they got out of the corridor, the scene that greeted them made them stop on their tracks, fear and horror crossing through their faces.

[Please tell me that THAT isn't the elevator.] Reena said while pointing at a destroyed platform on the center of the room.

[I fear that it IS the elevator Reena.] Thane responded.

[Damn, we'll have to find an alternate route.] Saren said while checking the map on his Omni tool. [Here, if we cross through this 3 rooms on the floor below us, and then we take the east corridor on the third room, we will get to a secondary elevator that will put us at 3 levels from the surface. Then we'll just have to cross another 4 rooms and take the elevator in that room to get the hell out of here.] Saren informed while highlighting the route in his Omni tool.

[It appears to be the only way out. Sir how much time we have left before command assume that we are dead?] Thane asked.

[We have 1 hour left. We will have to hurry up if we want to establish contact with command from down here.] Saren informed.

Thane and Reena nodded. The 3 Spectres prepared their weapons to cause the more possible damage towards the abominations that attacked them before moving towards the door. Also all of them mentally prepared to pass through the horrors that awaited them on the other side. Saren opened the door and then hell broke off in the room.

****September 12, 2172, 0330 Hours, Citadel Council Calendar,**** 8 hours before Citadel & System Alliance Relationship Talks,****Beta-Prometheus System, Outside Containment Facility on the Big Ring. ****

Outside the facility the security teams of the zone were nervous, it had been already 3 hours without any kind of contact from the Commandos or SPECTRES that were inside the facility.

"Hey, do you think that our people down there is okay?" An Asari guard asked her companion.

"I don't know, I mean we have a Commando team and a SPECTRE team down there, surely it's nothing but interference from the inside." The Turian answered to the Asari.

"Yea but, I don't know, I have this strange feeling like something bad is about to happen. Do you know what I mean?"

"It's probably your nerves, we have been all on edge since the loss of communications with the investigational team."

"I don't think that it's only my nervesâ€¦"

[Any available units, please respond. Is anyone alive out there?] The short range communications unit transmitted.

[Here patrolling guard Delta-2-5, what's the situation?] The Turian responded.

[We have been attacked, all our units are decimated! I think I'm the last one alive here!] The one on the other end said in a voice that

could only be described as terrified.

[Attacked? By the Guardians?]

[No, no, no! Monsters! They managed to turn the rest of our units against us in a matter of seconds, they, they transformed them in one of theirs!]

[Officer calm down! What's the position of the attackers?]

[They are outside the communications relâ€¦| Oh no please don't let them take me too, noâ€¦|] The transmission was cut by static.

[Officer are you there?] The Turian tried, [Officer please respond.] But he got nothing back besides static.

"Damn, we have to check the base. Come on let's go."

"Wait! I'm detecting incoming signals on the radar."

"Hostiles?"

"Negative, they are friendly butâ€¦|"

"But what?"

"They are moving too fast to be on foot, maybe command sent some vehicles?" She wondered.

Before her partner could respond, both of them heard some kind of scream and then, from the forest 4 strange beings jumped at them, killing them in a matter of seconds without giving them an opportunity to fight back.

Meanwhile on the supply landing field, the infected guards and infection forms were boarding the multiple drop ships. The drop ships took out of the landing field and moved towards the ships on orbit, ready to take control of them and then spread in the rest of the galaxy. The Flood had finally broken free from its prison, and this time it was more dangerous than ever.

202,574, 0410 Hours, Forerunner Calendar,** 7 hours 20 minutes before Citadel & System Alliance Relationship Talks,**** Labeled ****Beta-Prometheus System by the Citadel Council, Installation 06**_**.***_

216-Redeemer was not happy with the current events unfolded on the entire installation. He had distributed the Sentinels in the different containment facilities on the installation, but he had committed an error. He wasn't sure if he had committed it because of the stages on rampancy that he was at, or if it was because for thousands of years he had done nothing but stay practically inactive.

Yes he had managed to contain and secure 7 of the 10 containment facilities, which all of them were opened when the Citadel forces managed to unlock the linked security system on the doors of the facilities. Once the Flood on the other 3 containment facilities had

escaped, he sent the Sentinels to combat it. But he knew that it was just a matter of time before the Flood controlled the entire installation, he needed reinforcements of any kind right now, especially when the Citadel units had proved that they were totally inefficient against the Flood.

Just as 216-Redeemer was thinking of a way to solve this problem, the long range sensors detected slipspace signals on the system. He saw via the sensors that 6 ships had arrived, and by the information received by the scans, he could tell that 5 of the ships belonged to a single species, while the 6th one belonged to a different one. "Some kind of alliance it may seem. And by the looks of it, the Reclaimers are part of it! I need to prepare the first contact procedure in order to request their help against the flood." He said to himself while floating away to make the necessary preparations.

****September 12, 2574, 0410 Hours, Systems Alliance Calendar,**** 7 hours 20 minutes before Citadel & Systems Alliance Relationship Talks,**** Labeled ****Beta-Prometheus System by the Citadel Council****, CSO-Class Super Carrier ****_Darkness Coming_****.****

Thel Vadam was currently on the bridge of his ship, observing the status of the battle group and the system. He hadn't missed the fact that the entire Battle Group had practically exited slipspace inside the gaseous planet on the system, but knowing ONI there had to be a good reason.

"Lieutenant Tri'con contact the _Early Arrival _and the _Infinity_. Chief Warrant Officer Noles scan the system and send drones to the ring, I want a visual image on the tactical screen ASAP." Thel commanded.

"Affirmative Arbiter.", "It'll be done sir" Both of them responded.

Thel turned towards the tactical screen where an image of the system was starting to reveal, as well as the surface images of the ring. He could see that there were 4 ships on orbit around the ring, 2 of them belonged to the Turian Hierarchy while the other 2 were different, 'Probably Asari and Salarian ships.' Thel thought. He returned to watch the system again, he could see that it was only a matter of time before the Citadel forces detected their ships, but he also could tell that their focus was on 2 ships of the Citadel forces. Those 2 ships were apart from the rest of the ships and also both of them had several damage on their outer armor, but the other 2 ships were aiming their cannons at them.

"Arbiter the _Early Arrival _and the _Infinity _are online." Tri'con informed.

Thel nodded and then turned towards the communication's screen, there he saw the faces of Captain Foley and Admiral Lasky. For some reason Lasky looked perturbed while Foley looked preoccupied.

[Admiral Lasky, Captain Foley.] Thel saluted.

[Arbiter.] Both of them saluted back.

[Captain Foley, could you explain why the coordinates that you sent us were almost inside the planet that my ships are beside to?]

[Yes Arbiter. You'll see, when we arrived at the system, we noticed that the Citadel forces would be able to detect our slipspace entries on the system, unless the ships came already under camouflage or that our ships exited besides the planet. That way the storms of the planet would hide your incoming signatures for a period of time.] Foley explained.

[I see. In that case, can someone of you tell me what happened to those 2 ships?] Thel asked while pointing at the ships that were damaged.

[The Flood is what happened.] That simple sentence was everything that Thel needed to hear before starting giving orders.

[Admiral Lasky, I want your ship to destroy both of those ships, that's a priority, but contact and inform the other 2 ships about our intentions towards those ships. Also deploy 5 of your Charon Class Frigates 3 of them are to stay on formation while 2 accompany your ship. Once you are in range send 2 teams of SPARTANS down to the ring, one of them is to locate and extract the INDEX from the surface, and the other is to look for any survivors.]

[Understood Arbiter. What do we do if we encounter an Oracle on the ring?] Lasky asked.

[Unless it proves hostile, don't destroy it. Tell the SPARTAN teams to try and get all the relevant information from it.]

Lasky nodded before saluting and cutting the connection.

[Captain Foley I want your ship to coordinate with the 3 Corvettes and Charon Frigates to establish a perimeter around the relay. Nothing leaves or enters this system without permission, understood?]

[Affirmative Arbiter. With your permission, I want to set up a perimeter of tactical nuclear mines at 200,000 km from the relay, and a check point group on the other side of the relay.]

[Permission granted. If any Citadel ship attempts to enter the system, contact them and inform them that the zone is under quarantine by the System Alliance. If they still try to enter, disable their ships.] Thel said, [Also prepare 1 SHIVA bomb for deployment; do not fire it unless I personally give you the order and confirmation codes.]

[Affirmative Arbiter.] Foley said before disconnecting the line and moving towards the relay with the 3 Corvettes and Frigates.

"Arbiter, precise scans of the system are complete, also we are receiving visual images as well as thermal images of the ring's surface." Officer Noles informed.

Thel looked at the tactical screen where he located the biggest moon orbiting the gaseous planet that was besides his ship. "Lieutenant Commander Jes, I want you to coordinate a team on the surface of the

largest moon orbiting this planet." Thel said while pointing at said planet and moon, "We will deploy a Spire Tower to hide the _Darkness Coming_ from the Citadel ships. I want your team to establish defenses around it. Also, mark Anti-Air cannons positions for deployment around the spire."

"I'll start right away Arbiter." Jes said before leaving the bridge to prepare the tactical team.

Thel turned back to watch the visual images from the ring's surface, he could see that a big portion of the ring was already controlled by the flood, he could also see that the camp site of the Citadel forces was still intact.

"Lieutenant Tri'con, send word to Admiral Lasky to deploy a SPARTAN team on sector 5, quadrant 7 on the ring. There's a camp site still intact there."

"Affirmative Arbiter." Tri'con said.

****September 12, 2574, 0430 Hours, Systems Alliance Calendar,**** 7 hours before Citadel & Systems Alliance Relationship Talks,**** Labeled ****Beta-Prometheus System by the Citadel Council****, ****_UNSC Infinity_****.****

Admiral Lasky was currently observing and analyzing the tactical screen, thinking of how to convince the Citadel forces to move their ships out of the way so the MACs on the _Infinity_ didn't hit them. But that meant that, the one in charge of the ships would be condemning the remaining survivors of both infected ships to their deaths.

"Sir, the Citadel ships are online." Hades, the new AI of the _Infinity_, said. Since the discovery of another shield world in 2573, the Systems Alliance could now create AIs that have a 15 year lifespan period before entering to the rampancy stage. Making them more efficient and also with more time to even prolong the rampancy stage for about 2 extra years. This was a great advantage for the Systems Alliance because with the increased lifespan of the AIs, they could now perform even more tasks without the risk of accelerating the rampancy stage.

Lasky looked at the communications screen and there he saw a Turian and an Asari, both of them with concerned expressions. 'They probably know what's happening on the other 2 ships.' Lasky thought.

[Greetings, I'm Admiral Thomas Lasky of the Systems Alliance.]

After both the Asari and the Turian recovered a bit they answered, [Greetings, I'm Captain Tristana], [And I'm Commander Orgden.]

[Captain, Commander. While I would like to continue this conversation, I need that both of your ships move to the following coordinates.] Lasky said while sending the coordinates to them, [If you want to know why, the answer is because the other 2 ships of your group are infected and controlled by the Flood. If we don't destroy them now, then, they could escape and start infecting other planets, maybe even entire systems if they have the necessary numbers.] Lasky

said.

[Admiral, if you refer to the abominations that are inside the other 2 ships under my command, then I can't do that. At least not before we send help to extract the survivors of those ships!] Tristana said with an alarmed and somewhat scared voice.

[Captain, believe me when I say that it is already too late to look for any survivors on the ships. We have already encountered and fought against the Flood in the past, if we don't destroy those ships NOW, then we are condemning innocents to a fate worse than death. So I ask you to move your ships out of the way so we can fire on them.] Lasky pleaded. It wasn't that he was heartless, but in this kind of situations one had to put their personal feelings outside for the greater good of others.

[I WON'T abandon the crew inside those two ships. I'm sorry Admiral, but we are sending reinforcements to those ships.] Tristana said with determination.

[Captain, I know it hurts to leave people behind to their deaths, believe me I have passed for that situation already too many times. But it is already too late for the crew inside the infected ships, our scanners are only picking Flood signatures inside. If we don't destroy them now, then they will escape to the next system infecting even more people. So I won't ask this again. Move your ships out of the way, or we would fire to the infected ships, even if your ships are in the way of our fire trajectory.] Lasky said with a stern gaze.

Tristana looked conflicted, not being able to make a decision. Lasky noted that she was emotionally stressed, he didn't fault her for that, hell! he was also stressed because of the presence of the Flood on those ships. But under this situation the captain couldn't hide it any more, she wasn't in her best mind set right now. And it appeared that Commander Orgden noticed it too.

[Captain, we have to move our ships like the Admiral said, and also our scanners are only picking the abominations signatures too, it is already too late to save them.] Orgden said with sympathy towards what Tristana was filing.

After some more seconds of internal conflict, Tristana finally nodded and ordered her ship and the Commander's one to move out of the way.

After the ships were out of harm's way, Lasky didn't waste any more time, "Hades, open fire on the infected ships. Make sure that nothing is left of them." He said towards the AI.

"Affirmative Admiral"

Both the Alliance's and Citadel's ships watched as the 3 MAC cannons of the _Infinity_ fired, the rounds traveling through the void of space towards their targets. Two of the three rounds fired impacted the ship on the right, destroying it immediately in a ball of fire. The third round hit the other ship, but it wasn't destroyed and started to move out of range of _Infinity's_ weapons. While the ship had lost what appeared to be one of its wings, the Flood had already infected the ship enough to create its own organic hull outside the

ship, helping it absorb grand part of the kinetic energy of the round.

"Sir the ship it's exiting our weapon's maximum range." An officer said.

"Follow that ship, don't let it escape!" Lasky said.

"Sir, the ship is going too fast to reach it in time at our current velocity. Also they are powering up what I think it is their FTL capabilities."

"Fire the frontal energy projectors." Lasky ordered.

"Affirmative, energy projectors at 10% charge." Hades said.

"Sir the infected ship's energy levels are elevating. They are almost ready to make the jump." An officer on the bridge said.

"45% charge on the energy projectors." Hades updated.

"Sir, 30 seconds for the infected ship to be out of our weapons range." The officer replied.

"Are any other of our ships close enough of the infected ship?" Lasky asked to no one in particular.

"Negative sir."

"15 seconds for the infected ship to be out of our weapons range."

"80% charge ready. Sir we can fire one energy projector, but it will be at low power." Hades informed.

"Do it, that ship is already damaged enough, it should be enough power to finish it."

"5 seconds"

"Firing frontal energy projector."

Lasky saw as a beam of pure white light exited the Infinity, approaching the infected ship in matter of seconds. But just as it was about to hit it, the infected ship made the jump towards the void of space.

"Fuck! Anyone, I want to know where that ship went. And I want to know it yesterday!" Lasky ordered.

"Affirmative sir." An officer responded.

"Sir, SPARTAN teams Crimson and Majestic are ready for deployment." Hades informed.

"Tell them to board the pelicans." Lasky said.

"Affirmative, message sent." Hades said.

"Contact the frigate Ace of Spades Lieutenant."

"Yes sir. _Ace of Spades _on screen 3 sir." The Lieutenant responded.

Lasky turned to screen 3, there he saw Commander Sor, a Kig-Yar veteran from the Human-Covenant war.

[Admiral.] Sor saluted.

[Commander.] Lasky returned the salute, [I want your ship to enter the ring's atmosphere, you are to provide orbital and air support to the 2 SPARTAN teams that we are deploying. Also assist with the evacuation of any Citadel forces on the ring.]

[Affirmative Admiral.] Sor replied before cutting the transmission.

"Sir, I got the trajectory vector of the infected ship. It appears that it is moving towards the next system." The navigation officer replied.

"Noted. Hades, deploy the frigates _Sunset _and _Eclipse Shadow_, inform them to persecute and destroy that infected ship."

"Affirmative Admiral, deploying frigates."

Lasky nodded and turned to the tactical screen to watch the progress on the system. He saw that the Spire Tower had already been deployed, hiding the _Darkness Coming_ from all sensors and visual range, that is the sensors that didn't had Alliance's programing to detect those ships cloaked. Lasky also noted that the _Ace of Spades _was already on orbit above the Citadel's camp site.

"Hades, stablsh a line with Majestic and Crimson teams."

"SPARTANS on the line sir."

September 12, 2574, 0520 Hours, Systems Alliance Calendar,** 6 hours 10 minutes before Citadel & Systems Alliance Relationship Talks,**** Labeled ****Beta-Prometheus System by the Citadel Council****, Pelican KILO-2-3-7.**

Jhon-117, also known as Master Chief and now as Crimson 4, was currently checking his weapons and armor systems for the second time on the pelican. He had brought his trusted MA5D Assault Rifle, an M6G Pistol, a Carbine, and a hard-light shield. But he wasn't the only one checking his weapons systems, the rest of Crimson team was doing it to.

Lieutenant Commander Axel, or Crimson 1, was checking his M392 DMR, BR55HB SR Battle Rifle, a T25 DEP-Plasma Pistol, and his Autosentry. Second-Lieutenant Sarx, or Crimson 2, was checking his T51 DER/1-Plasma Repeater, his pair of T33 GML-Needler, his T1 EW/S-Energy Sword, and his camouflage unit. And like the rest of his companions, Lieutenant Blackburn, or Crimson 3, was calibrating the scope of his SRS99-Sniper Rifle; he also had an M6G pistol and a T31R-Needle Rifle, and the Promethean Vision on his helmet.

John had been assigned to Crimson team the moment that he had stepped

into the _Infinity_. At first he wasn't comfortable with the sudden change, being a lone wolf for the most part of 2 decades had being the main reason, but once he started to train with them, he started to feel more comfortable.

[Crimson team, incoming transmission from the Admiral, patching it through.] The pilot informed.

The central part of the cargo bay of the pelican lit up, showing the holographic images of Admiral Lasky and Majestic Team. The SPARTANS immediately saluted, receiving a salute back from the Admiral and the signal to stay at ease.

{Crimson, Majestic team.} Lasky commenced, {Your objectives are to evacuate the survivors on the ring as well as to retrieve the Index. Majestic you'll be in charge of the evacuation, the Frigate _Ace of Spades_ will provide support fire. You need to guide the survivors to this clearing at the north of the Citadel camp site.} A holographic image of a clearing at 2 km north from the camp site appeared, {There the _Ace of Spades_ will land and open its cargo bay to extract everyone in one go.}

{Understood Admiral.} DeMarco said.

{Crimson, you'll be deployed at 3 km from where we assume the Index is. Your objective is to retrieve the Index, we can't let it fall on enemy hands. Also, the insertion point is on controlled Flood space, so air support will be limited or non-existent depending on how much inside enemy territory you are.}

{Understood Sir.} Axel replied.

{Majestic, once you finish your objective, you are to help Crimson on retrieving the Index. A Stealth Phantom drop ship will get you to Crimson's position.}

{Understood.} DeMarco answered again.

Lasky nodded, {If any of you encounter the Oracle of the ring, don't fire on it unless it proves hostile. If you got the chance try to extract all the relevant information from it.} After hearing the affirmatives from the SPARTANS, Lasky continued, {Good luck SPARTANS.} And with that Lasky cut the transmission.

[2 minutes to the LZ Crimson.] The pilot informed.

"All right people, you heard the Admiral. Chief you have fought the Flood before, any suggestions?" Axel asked.

"Shoot at the center of mass until they drop dead, explosives also work. And also, don't fight the Flood alone unless is your only option."

"Noted." Axel said.

[1 minute to the LZ Crimson.] The pilot updated.

Crimson team prepared itself for the landing. Moments later the back door of the Pelican opened, showing the multiple structures on the ring. The Pelican landed in one of the structures, letting Crimson

disembark.

[Good luck out there Crimson.] The pilot said before taking off.

[Alright people check your radios.] Axel said.

[Crimson 2, check]

[Crimson 3, check]

[Crimson 4, check]

[Alright people, let's move.] Axel said.

Crimson team moved through the room stopping at the entrance of what they presumed was an elevator tunnel that went down.

[Where do you think that this tunnel leads to?] Sarx asked.

[To the outside of the structure, thermal images shown no enemy presence on it.] Blackburn responded.

[Alright, Crimson 2 and 4, you two go down there and secure the zone. Crimson 3 and I will over watch the road ahead from up here.]

[Understood.] Sarx responded.

Sarx and John jumped inside the tube, once they got to the bottom of it they were met with a field that resembled some kind of warzone. Debris was everywhere on the area offering some cover, craters covered the entire terrain, and there were some kind of vehicles destroyed on the area. The fact that it was raining didn't offered a good view to the zone either.

[Crimson 1, Crimson 4 here do you copy?]

[Affirmative Crimson 4, what do you guys see?]

[Some kind of warzone, there's no signal of Flood presence down here. I can also see a big tower 2 kilometers to the north.]

[We can see it too from up here. It appears that there's were the Index is. Blackburn says that he can see several Sentinels guarding the structure.]

[What are our orders sir? Do we proceed to the tower?]

[Negative, wait for Blackburn and me to get down there.]

[Sir, multiple Flood combat forms approaching Crimson 2 and 4's position.] Blackburn said.

[Crimson 2 and 4, prepare for engagement, Blackburn and I will give covering fire from up here.]

[Understood sir.] John said before turning to his companion, noticing that he was slightly more tense than normal. "First time fighting the Flood?"

"First time fighting the Flood alongside a SPARTAN." Sarx responded.

"Installation 04 or Grand Charity?" John asked.

"Grand Charity, like you humans would say, it was a living hell." Sarx chuckled trying to alleviate their situation.

Chief nodded and turned to watch the field ahead. He heard the sound of Sniper fire from up the structure that they had come from.

"It appears that the parasite is close." Sarx commented.

"It appears so. Sarx activate your camouflage, I'll draw their attention once they get here, then you strike from behind." John said.

Sarx nodded before disappearing on sight, not even the outline of his form could be seen when he was moving. The only thing that could tell John where Sarx was, was his radar.

Some seconds passed before John saw the Flood forces approaching, he didn't waste any more time and opened fire with his assault rifle. He managed to kill 2 of the incoming combat forms before taking cover to reload. He swapped his assault rifle for the Carbine before getting off cover and aiming at the wall besides the Flood forces. Through the scope he saw an arachnid Flood form that was firing its spikes at him. John aimed between the two towers loaded of spikes and fired 5 rounds towards it. The arachnid like Flood contracted in itself letting a shriek as the rounds impacted before moving to another position.

[Sarx take them from behind now.] John said.

Sarx didn't respond, he opted instead to activate his Energy Sword. Sarx ran towards the Flood's position from behind, cutting, slashing, and firing through their forces without the Flood knowing until it was already too late to respond. One of the arachnid forms fired its spikes at Sarx but it couldn't fire more than a couple before a sniper round crossed through its form, killing it and another combat form besides it. The spiderlike thing dropped dead on top of another combat form before it too received 5 rounds from a DMR, killing it in the process too.

Sarx checked his surroundings before saying, [The parasite is eliminated. I can't detect any more on the area.]

[Affirmative. We are going down there.] Axel responded while he and Blackburn jumped inside the tunnel.

John surveyed the combat zone, noticing that one of the dead combat forms had some kind of pistol with it, he grabbed it and inspect it. When John took it he noticed that the weight of the pistol wasn't right, according to his helmet's scans the pistol should weight 3 times more of what it weight it now. He pressed one of the side buttons and watched in astonishment as the pistol retracted in itself forming a square form, he also noticed that the weight of the pistol had increased. 'Some kind of system for easy carrying perhaps?' John wondered.

"Hey Chief, what you got over there?" Axel asked.

"Some kind of pistol sir." He responded while passing it to him.

"Hmm, hold on to it, ONI will want to inspect it." Axel responded before turning back towards the rest of his team. "Alright people, telemetry shows that the tower ahead is where our objective is. It is at 2 Kilometers from our position but the zone between is Flood controlled territory. There's what we presume some kind of anti-air batteries on the zone, if we want to get out of here we will have to destroy them. Blackburn, contact the Ace of Spades and request a Specter vehicle."

"Affirmative sir." Blackburn responded.

[Majestic team, Crimson here, do you read?] Axel asked through the radio.

[Affirmative Crimson, what do you need?] DeMarco answered.

[How's your objective going?]

[We are escorting the survivors towards the clearing. So far we have managed to hold back the Flood with the help of some soldiers and Commandos from the camp.]

[Understood, in that case meet us on the tower when you finish.] Axel said while sending the coordinates to DeMarco.

[Affirmative, Majestic out.]

"Sir, Specter arrives in 5 minutes." Blackburn said.

"Understood, keep an eye out people."

After securing the zone for the second time a Phantom carrying a Specter arrived. Its gravitational hold being deactivated to drop the assault vehicle for the SPARTAN's use, before taking off.

"Sarx you drive, Blackburn take the turret, Chief you got right side. Let's move." Axel ordered.

Everyone got inside the Specter before taking off towards the tower. On the way to the tower they passed by multiple destroyed fields and structures, vehicles, craters, and bodies filled the path.

The Specter speeded up through a natural bridge that connected two cannons, but then it stopped. On the other side of the bridge, directly cutting their path were multiple Flood anti-air guns and several Flood combat forms.

[Sir, what are your orders?] Sarx asked.

[Pull back to the edge of the cannon, Blackburn order an orbital strike in that anti-air position.] Axel replied.

[Affirmative.] Blackburn responded, {Ace of Spades do you read? Crimson 3 here, we require orbital bombardment in our position,

over.}

{Crimson 3 we read you. Orbital bombardment is authorized, mark the tangos for Archer firing over.}

{Affirmative marking tangos.} Blackburn responded, [Sir, orbital bombardment is authorized, we just need to mark the tangos.]

[Understood.] Axel said before taking his laser designator and marking the Flood position.

{Target acquired, Crimson step back we are firing in 15 seconds over.} The _Ace of Spades _responded.

[Sarx pull this thing back now.] Axel ordered.

The Specter speeded back towards some rock formation for cover. Once they made it all the way to cover the Archer Missiles struck the Flood position, killing everything that was in the area.

[Alright Sarx let's keep moving.] Axel said.

The Specter moved through the bridge, but when it was half way through, Crimson team heard a crack. Sarx activated the internal scanners of the Specter and what he found preoccupied him.

[Sir, the bridge's integrity it's compromised, we won't make it to the other side before the bridge collapses.]

[Accelerate this thing at the maximum, Chief prepare a gravitational lift. Fire it in front of the Specter when I give you the signal.] Axel said.

[Got it.] Chief responded.

The Specter accelerated towards the other side of the bridge at its maximum velocity. And that's when the bridge started to collapse, it suddenly became a race between the collapsing bridge and the Specter. The Specter tried to go even faster, but not even all the technology that it had could compete with Newton's laws.

[Chief, deploy the lift now!] Axel said.

John launched the gravitational lift with all his force towards the front of the Specter. It landed 10 meters ahead of it, immediately activating after hitting the floor. The Specter speeded towards it as the bridge collapsed right under it, but in the last second the gravitational lift launched the Specter up and ahead. Its velocity compensating for the distance required to arrive to the safety of the other side of the cannon resulted barely enough. The Specter landed and speeded towards the tower without glancing back to the destroyed bridge.

Some minutes after crossing the bridge, Crimson team encountered one of the many Flood resistance that was between them and the tower. Blackburn immediately opened fire, the plasma turret of the Specter, aided by DMR and Assault Rifle fire, cut through enemy lines killing any Flood resistance left on the area.

[Sarx! How much till the tower?] Axel yells above the noise.

[1.2 Kilometers sir, at this rate we will arrive in 15 minutes.]

[Understood, Crimson keep firing. Don't let this bastards have a chance to hit us.] Axel commanded while killing an arachnid Flood form that tried to hijack the Specter.

****September 12, 2172, 0600 Hours, Citadel Council Calendar,**** 5 hours 30 minutes before Citadel & System Alliance Relationship Talks,****Beta-Prometheus System, Inside Containment Facility on the Big Ring. ****

The 3 SPECTRES team was currently fighting the abominations on the room before the second elevator that will take them to the surface of the ring. All of them were already too tired but their survival instinct negated to succumb to such need of rest. Saren had already run out of thermal clips for all his weapons, he was currently using his Omni Blade to combat the abominations. He had discovered that the Omni Blade was a really effective weapon against those things but that meant that he had to fight in close and personal.

Thane, like Saren, had only his dual Omni Blades to combat the parasites. His training as an assassin for the most part of his life had definitely helped in this situation. That and the biotic technics that he knew made him a hard target to kill, especially when he used charge to get out of harm's way. Reena, like Thane, was also using her biotics to kill the enemy. While she had found out that most of her offensive technics didn't work on the enemy, she had found that a detonation of biotic energy was lethal to the infected.

After some more seconds of fighting, the three SPECTRES finally cleared the room.

[Team report, what's your status?] Saren asked.

[I'm good, ready to proceed.] Thane answered.

[Me too, I'm ready to get out of this hell.] Reena said.

[Good, the elevator that'll take us to the surface is in the next room, thermal image shows no enemy presence. Don't let that relax you people, the enemy could be waiting inactive like on the previous room.] Saren said.

On the room before the one that they were in, Saren had received a similar result from thermal images. Thinking that the room was clear, he and his team entered without expecting any kind of trouble. They were proved wrong when the dead bodies of the room started to stand, attacking them on sight. That small filing of security had put them in the long firefight that they had just finished.

[Don't worry sir, I'm not letting my guard down again.] Reena said.

Saren nodded and proceeded to open the door towards the next room. When he and his team entered, they were met by the sight of multiple bodies on the room. Saren and his team didn't waste any time and started to cut, in the case of Thane and Saren, and disintegrate, in

the case of Reena, the bodies.

[That should do for now.] Thane said.

[Hopefully they can't take control of just parts of the body.] Saren said, [Thane get working on that elevator, Reena you are with me.]

Thane went to the elevator's terminal and started working on it. Meanwhile Saren and Reena circled the room, looking for any signs of hostile activity. After a few minutes Thane called them, telling them that the elevator had power to take them towards the surface. Saren and Reena immediately stepped inside the elevator, while Thane activated it.

The elevator took up, going at a slow pace towards the surface.

[You know? I'll never understand how it is that we can't make elevators faster.] Saren said trying to alleviate the situation, after everything that had happened to them he knew that they needed the good atmosphere.

[That's one of the many mysteries of the universe.] Thane responded with some humor, while Reena just giggled.

[I mean seriously, it takes you too long to just go up or down one floor. And don't get me started on the annoying song that it's present on every elevator. Seriously even the Geth have more mercy with us.]

At that all of them started laughing, all of them thankful for the small moment of peace that they had. But like every good thing, at some point it has to end. The elevator reached its destination, immediately Saren, Thane, and Reena ran towards the exit that guided them to the surface. But when they got there they stopped in their tracks.

[What happened over here?] Reena asked.

The sight that they were seeing was one of hell. Vehicles were destroyed on the area, craters decorated the floor, and there was smoke everywhere.

[It appears that the parasite escaped the facility and attacked our forces on the surface. But to cause a destruction like this, there must be many other facilities with the parasite to cause this level of destruction.] Thane said.

[Damn!] Saren swore. [Here SPECTRE Saren Arterius to anyone on this frequency, do you read?] Only static could be heard. [I repeat, here SPECTRE Saren Arterius to anyone on this frequency, do you read?] More static, [It appears that I don't have enough power to contact anyone out here.]

[We should move to high ground then that should give us a clear signal.] Thane suggested.

[Let's move then.]

The three SPECTRES moved through the terrain, checking their corners

and radars constantly. So far they hadn't encountered more infected hostiles, at least not alive. The three SPECTRES found some thermal clips around the multiple corpses that were scattered in the area.

[At least our people didn't went down without giving a fight.] Saren commented while taking a shotgun from a dead Asari.

[I really don't understand how a being this vicious could exit. Not even the Rachni were this hostile.] Reena said.

Thane in the meanwhile was finishing his prayers for the dead soldiers on the field. When he finished his high senses heard something approaching.

[Sir some kind of vehicle is approaching our position.]

[Vehicle, how do you know?] Saren asked curiously while at the same time preparing his newly acquired shotgun.

[The sound of some kind of machine gun firing give it away.] Thane answered.

[Take cover it could be an enemy controlled vehicle.] Saren said.

The three SPECTRES took cover behind a destroyed MAKO. Once they were under cover, Saren took out some binoculars and started surveying the area. There on the distance he could see some kind of arrow like vehicle approaching towards their position. It was firing at all of its flanks at the abominations, and surely there was some kind of machine gun firing, just as Thane had said.

[It appears to be friendly, but I don't recognize any of the people aboard and I'm talking about their species.] Saren said.

[Probably the newly System Alliance that the Councilors mentioned.] Thane wondered.

[Perhaps but what are they doing on this system? Did they just stumbled on it or something?] Saren asked skeptically.

[Don't know. We should make our presence known to them, maybe they can help us get out of here.] Reena suggested.

[Alright, they are almost here. Let's get out of cover carefully, we don't want to startle them.]

The three SPECTRES got out of cover, their weapons packed on their respective places on their armor. The strange vehicle made it towards their position, and stopped. The machine gun was aiming at the back and flanks of the vehicle, 'Making sure that nothing takes them by surprise while dealing with us.' Saren thought approvingly.

"Hey you three, who are you? And what are you doing out here?" One of the armored juggernauts asked them while the second one had its weapon pointing at them.

Saren thanked the new translation software that the council had sent to everyone on Citadel space, 'At least communication won't be a

problem.' Saren thought, "We are a SPECTRE team sent here to investigate what was happening inside one of the facilities."

"Well then you now know what the Flood is capable of. Chief, check them for any signs of infection." One of the armored beings said.

"The Flood? Is that the parasites that we are fighting?" Saren asked, while Chief took out some kind of scanner and started to scan them.

"Yea, a plague like virus that turns every dead and alive mass that it encounters in a space zombie."

"They are clean sir." Chief said.

The armored man nodded and turned to the guy managing the turret, "Blackburn, contact the _Ace of Spades_, tell them that we found a group of survivors."

Blackburn nodded, and the armored being turned back towards them, "So, who was the one responsible for this outbreak?" He asked.

"My guess would be the science team that went down the facility, but I'm not sure about the other ones."

"It appears that the egghead have the same mindset on every species." The armored being commented.

"Sir, the _Ace of Spades_ can't sent a Pelican or Phantom for extraction, we have to destroy the other two anti-air positions on the area." Blackburn said.

"Understood, okay people I guess that you are coming with us, get on the vehicle." The armored being said.

[Do you think it wise to follow them?] Thane asked.

[So far they hadn't have gave me a reason to not trust them, besides they are our only way out of here.] Saren said.

The three SPECTRES got on the vehicle that was too crowded right now. Saren sat on the left side with the leader, while Thane and Reena sat on the right side barely fitting on the small space.

"So what's the System Alliance doing here?" Saren asked.

"We were nearby when we received a transmission requesting help, when we arrived the Flood had already taken control of the ring and 2 ships on orbit. We destroyed one of the ships, the other one is being persecuted as of right now. Once we landed here, one of our frigates started to extract the survivors from the multiple camp sites on the ring."

"Then are you and your team looking for more survivors?"

"Something like that."

Saren was about to ask what he mean by that but he was interrupted by an explosion that threw the vehicle to the side. Everyone immediately

got out and took cover nearby as another projectile hit the vehicle destroying it.

"Sarx! What happened over there?"

"Ambush sir, the scanners didn't detect anything until it was already too late." Sarx responded.

"Blackburn find that rocket firing bastard and kill it." The leader said as another rocket hit their cover.

Blackburn took out of cover, scanning the area with his sniper rifle and promethean vision. It didn't took him long to find the culprit behind the explosions. He took aim and steadied his cardiac rate and respiration, he adjusted the elevation and wind parameters. When he was ready, he pulled the trigger. The bullet traveled straight ahead, turning a little to the right and down because of the wind of the storm and the elevation, it crossed through the field until it hit its target. The rocket launcher exploded as the bullet hit he explosive rocket, engulf the Flood form in a ball of fire.

"Enemy down." Blackburn said.

****Crimson's Team Point Of View.****

After Blackburn killed the Flood with the rocket launcher, Axel moved toward the destroyed Specter, noticing that it was beyond functional.

[We will have to continue on foot Crimson.]

[What about the 3 Survivors?] Chief asked.

[For now they'll have to accompany us until we can get them out of here.]

Axel approached the 3 aliens and then said, "Alright guys it appears that we will be going on foot from now on. So we need you to tune your radios with ours." Axel said while giving them the frequency.

The 3 SPECTRES tuned their radios and checked them before nodding.

[Alright let the introductions begin, I'm Axel or Crimson one, that's Sarx and Blackburn, Crimson 2 and 3, and that's Chief or Crimson 4] Axel introduced while pointing at each one respectively.

[Got it, I'm Saren, and my companions are Thane and Reena.] Saren introduced also.

[Alright let's move then.]

The 7 individuals moved through the zone towards the tower, all of them observing their surroundings carefully. It didn't took them long to approach one of the anti-air positions.

[Blackburn you know the drill.] Axel said.

Blackburn nodded and contacted the Ace of Spades while the three

SPECTRES looked at each other confused. After a minute, Blackburn took out the laser designator and aimed at the Flood position, and just like before a barrage of missiles hit the Flood hard, destroying and killing everything on the area.

[Crimson team, Majestic here, do you read? Over.]

[Majestic we read you over.] Axel responded.

[We have finished with the evacuation, have you taken out the anti-air guns yet?]

[Negative, we have one more to take out, then the skies will be clear.]

[Understood, hurry up command wants to bombard the ring. Over.] Majestic team said before cutting the line.

[Alright let's double it, command wants to bombard the ring people.] Axel ordered.

None of them argued, opting instead to move towards the last anti-air gun on the area. During their travel they got engaged in small skirmishes of which none of them were difficult to win.

[This is strange.] John commented.

[What is it Chief?] Blackburn asked.

[The Flood, they usually overwhelm you with their numbers, but now it appears that they want to just stall us.]

[Why would they be doing that?] Axel asked.

[Don't know, during the battle of the Ark and Earth against the Flood, we discovered for sure that they had a mental link with each other. But what we don't know for sure is that if all the Flood forms share it or just the ones that are nearby.] Chief explained.

[So you are saying that the Flood is planning something against us based on previous encounters?] Sarx asked.

[All I'm saying is that they aren't acting their typical selves.]

[And what would be their typical selves, surely you don't want to tell me that they are a pacifist race after all this.] Saren said.

[No, they are usually worse. Compared to this, they almost look like a pacifist race.] Chief responded.

That sentence made Saren stop in his tracks, 'If this is how they are a pacifically race, then how bad is this Flood when they are violent?' Saren wondered with a hint of fear.

No more conversation was made during the rest of the trip, all of them wrapped in their own thoughts while they approached the last anti-air position on the sector. 10 minutes later, the SPARTANS and SPECTRES made it to a small hill that overlooked the anti-air gun

position.

[Blackburn what can you see?] Axel asked while he took out his binoculars, alongside Saren.

[Heavily fortified position, the debris alongside the AA-gun gives cover to the ground forces. An orbital strike will only take out the AA-gun, we would have to deal with the troops by ourselves.]

[What about some missiles strikes after destroying the AA-gun? That should take care of the ground force.] Saren suggested.

Both SPARTANS turned to look at him, making Saren tense a little after seeing only his reflection on their visors.

[That could work, but we still need to draw them out of cover.] Blackburn responded.

[I'll take care of that, I just need 2 more companions with me.] Chief said.

[Alright Chief, Sarx you are with him.] Axel said.

[And I'll go too.] Saren offered.

[Are you sure?] Axel asked.

[I didn't become a SPECTRE for nothing you know?] Saren said with the trace of a smile.

Axel nodded before turning to watch the enemy position. Blackburn took out his communications unit and started to request orbital bombardment followed by an air strike. Meanwhile, Chief, Sarx, and Saren were making their way down towards the clearing.

[Sir, we have confirmation. Orbital bombardment in 60 seconds.] Blackburn said.

[Understood.] Axel responded, [Chief, you and your team need to take cover now.]

[Understood.] Chief responded.

It didn't took long before a barrage of missiles could be seen on the sky, heading towards the AA-gun on the clearing. The missiles made impact on the target, destroying it in a matter of seconds. The Flood ground forces managed to survive just to get fired at by Chief's team. The following reaction was instant, the Flood took out of cover towards Chief's team position but they didn't took notice of the longsword squad that came towards their direction, nor did the Flood took notice of the bomb deployment that followed.

Up on the hill, Crimson 1 and 3, alongside Thane and Reena, saw as the Flood died at the hand of carpet bombing, leaving nothing alive in its thunderous wave of destruction.

{Crimson team, targets have been eliminated, sending Falcons to your position now. ETA 2 minutes over.} The _Ace of Spades_ informed.

[Let's get down there, your ride is coming.] Axel said.

Two minutes later the rotors of the Falcons could be heard on the distance, they landed on the clearing letting the SPECTRES and SPARTANS to get on. Axel looked towards Saren and just nodded at him, Saren, who had seen Axel nod, returned the gesture signaling their mutual respect between both of them.

The Falcons took off towards their respective landing zones, Crimson's heading towards the tower, while the other one took towards the Frigate. During the way, Chief could see that the Flood had overrun the ring with their forces, leaving only the heavily fortified tower intact for the most part. Sentinels flew around the tower while turrets eliminated the Flood treat.

When the Falcon approached the tower's area, the Sentinels ignore it completely, directing Chief's theories that the Oracle of the installation knew that they were approaching.

A ramp extended itself from the top of the tower, being constructed by the superior architect technology that was that of the Forerunners. The Falcon landed, taking off after Crimson disembarked.

Axel took point, followed by Blackburn and Sarx taking the flanks and Chief covering their backs. They approached a door which opened when they got close enough. Inside they were met by a spherical being, floating a good 2 meters from the ground. It had a central blue eye tinted by red on the margins, the Oracle of the installation had finally made itself present.

"Greetings Reclaimers, I'm 216-Redeemer, the Oracle of Installation 06." Redeemer said with a joyous voice, "Alert non-Reclaimer detected, protocol can't be followed under this situation."

"Hey blue light, Sarx is with us, so don't try anything or we will load you with bullets." Axel said.

"My apologies Reclaimer I wasn't aware that an alliance between your species existed. If that's the case then access will be permitted to him and your allies." Redeemer clarified, "Now follow me, we need to fire the Installation to kill the Flood."

"Negative we are containing the Flood by our own means." Axel responded.

"And how are you going to manage that? The Flood infection is already too big to contain by basic tactics."

"We are bombarding the entire ring that should kill the Flood, if not then we will bombard it again until it stays dead."

"But a complete bombardment on the Installation will only destroy all the facilities!" Redeemer said with a terrified voice.

"Don't worry, we would try to not damage the facilities, but I recommend you to either put them underground or seal them really tight." Blackburn reassured.

"Then why come all the way over here if you are going to bombard the

Installation?" Redeemer asked curiously.

"To retrieve the Index, we can't let it fall on the hands of the Flood." Axel responded.

"We can agree on that. Follow me, I'll take you to the Index."

The SPARTANS followed Redeemer towards the Index's location, all the while taking a look around. When they arrived at the room containing the Index, they noticed that it was levitating in the center of a hole inside the room.

[Crimson, do you read? Majestic here, over.]

[We read you Majestic, what's the situation?]

[We are at 5 minutes from the tower, how's your objective going?]

[We are extracting the Index, we also made contact with the Oracle of the Installation.]

[Understood, we will be here for extraction. Over.] Majestic said before cutting the line.

Axel turned to look back at the Index, and he saw as Chief walked to it on a bridge made of pure light. When Chief grabbed it he looked at it before attaching it to his armor.

"Alright people let's head back, our ride is here. Redeemer I suggest that you order the Sentinels to take underground cover or to get out of the ring, also you are welcome to come aboard our ship." Axel said.

"Thank you Reclaimer, I'll accompany you!" Redeemer responded cheerfully.

Crimson team, accompanied by the Oracle, made their way towards the landing pad where a Phantom drop ship was waiting for them. It opened one of its side doors to let them in, while Majestic team took covering stances outside the Phantom. Axel looked down towards the defenses of the tower and saw as multiple Flood forms made their way up, either by the inside or outside.

[Alright, pilot take off.] Axel said after all of the SPARTANS and the Oracle made it inside the Phantom.

The Phantom took flight towards the _Ace of Spades_ just as the Flood reached the top floor of the tower, firing at the drop ship with the few weapons that it had.

{_Ace of Spades_ objective complete, commence bombardment.} Axel said.

{Understood Crimson, Good job, over.}

September 12, 2574, 0830 Hours, Systems Alliance Calendar,** 3 hours before Citadel & Systems Alliance Relationship Talks,**** Labeled ****Beta-Prometheus System by the Citadel Council****, CSO-Class Super Carrier ****_Darkness Coming_****.**

"Arbiter, SPARTAN teams have completed their objectives. All the evacuation is complete." Lieutenant Tri'con reported.

"Understood tell the ships to commence bombardment, also contact the _Early Arrival_." Thel responded.

"Message sent, the _Early Arrival_ is on the line Arbiter."

Thel turned towards the communications screen where Captain Foley was.

[Captain Foley, deploy the SHIVA, authorization code: A378563X2HJY39A1.]

[Understood Captain, Shiva deployed over.] Foley responded before cutting the line.

"Officer Noles give me a visual of the ring on the tactical screen."

"Visual coming online Arbiter."

Thel turned towards the tactical screen, he saw the process of the bombardment by the _Infinity_ and its 2 Charon frigates. So far 40% of the ring had been purged with a barrage of tactical nuclear missiles or HAVOK class missiles. The trajectory of the SHIVA bomb was shown in the screen also, with a chronometer at the side indicating the time left for detonation. 90 seconds passed before the missile entered the ring's atmosphere, 10 seconds later the bomb detonated. It killed everything in its radius, which was of the size of the ring's radius.

When the explosion ended, the scanners register that any Flood presence on the ring was terminated. Thel nodded to himself before looking at the rest of the data on the screen, the blockade was still active on the system, and the installation of the defenses of the Spire was finished. But this didn't mean that they were going to abandon the system, no they still needed to check the entire system for any more Flood presence and also establish an operations base without the Citadel forces knowing.

There also was the issue of the Flood controlled ship that escaped the system, they hadn't had any word so far of the Frigates that persecute it, at least not yet.

"Arbiter, incoming transmission of the _Eclipse Shadow_." Tri'con informed.

'Talking about the devil, and it shall show itself.' Thel thought, "Patch it through Lieutenant."

Tri'con nodded and put the transmission on the communications screen. There Thel saw that the Captain of the Frigate had some bruises on his face, also he could see some fires on the bridge that were being extinguished by the crew.

[Captain, what happened?]

[An ambush sir.] The Captain responded.

[Care to elaborate?]

[When we arrived at the system the Flood was already waiting for us, it fired the main gun of their ship at our engines before we could do anything. That gun, while it has a small quantity of power compared to our MACs, it compensates with the rate of fire. Before we could fire something at the ship, it managed to destroy one of our engines with a barrage of missiles before dropping ground forces in one populated planet and taking off with their FTL. The _Sunset_ went to the planet to provide assistance, while our ship went under reparations. Flood presence on the planet has been eliminated, but the ship managed to escape towards unknown space." The Captain said.

"Understood Captain, finish cleaning the Planet of any Flood presence. I'll contact ONI to try and localize that ship." The arbiter said before cutting the connection.

"Lieutenant, send word towards ONI headquarters, tell them what happened."

"Right away Arbiter." Tri'con responded.

'Hopefully we can contain the collateral damage of this situation.' Thel thought.

****September 12, 2172, 1800 Hours, Citadel Council Calendar, Widow System, Citadel Station, Council Chambers.****

Councilor Valern was currently in the private chamber of the council. He was waiting for the other two councilors to inform them of the news that he got from the STG ships that were on the Beta-Prometheus system, and the Hades Nexus system.

Some minutes passed before the doors towards the chamber opened, both Tevos and Sparatus entered, sitting themselves on one of the couches facing Valern.

"Valern why did you needed to see us so unexpectedly?" Tevos asked curiously.

"I have got information from STG about recent events on the Beta-Prometheus system, and the Hades Nexus system."

"What kind of information?" Sparatus asked interested.

"The Systems Alliance is on both systems right now."

"What, since when?" Tevos asked.

"My sources inform that they arrived at both systems before our diplomatic talks with them, so technically they haven't broken any of our conditions."

"What reason did they have to go to those two systems? Is it because of the Big Ring?" Sparatus asked.

"The report that SPECTRE agent Saren Arterius gave, says that they were exploring a nearby system when they intercepted a SOS call from

one of our ships. When they arrived they destroyed two of our ships that had been 'Infected' by some kind of parasite organism, before deploying two teams on the ring."

"Infected ships? And two teams on the surface? Why would they only deploy two teams to help?" Sparatus asked.

"The ships' crew that was infected, was beyond salvage. They were turned in mindless corpses that killed and infected you on sight. On the ring, our forces had been overrun, only one campsite was left intact, that's where one of the teams was deployed. That team escorted the survivors towards a clearing where one of the Alliance's frigates landed and extracted the survivors. The other team was eliminating enemy positions on the ring so their ships could bombard it."

"Bombard it? They surely used a lot of resources to manage that kind of bombardment." Tevos commented.

"Negative, the Alliance deployed a nuke on the ring. Every sign of this 'Flood' was eliminated. But the Alliance is still present on the system."

"Any other reason why they are still there?" Sparatus asked.

"The Alliance says that is for security of nearby systems, they even set up a blockade on both sides of the Relay to prevent any traffic using it, unless it is strictly under our orders. Or so the Alliance says."

"Okay that explains their presence on the system, what about the Hades Nexus system?" Sparatus asked.

"Yes, one of the infected ships managed to escape towards it, the Alliance sent two Frigate for persecution. STG reports that the ship managed to ambush them, it managed to disable one of them before launching ground forces towards the colony on the system and taking off toward unexplored space. The other ship decided to help contain the Flood presence on the planet while the other went under repairs."

"What's the situation on the colony?" Tevos asked.

"Don't worry the Defense force of the planet and the Alliance managed to contain the Flood before it was too late. The number of casualties is estimated to be of 500. Only 200 of them are civilians, the rest is military."

"What should we do in respect to this?" Sparatus asked.

"Call the Alliance, thank them for their help. Also we should find a way to make the Alliance leave the Beta-Prometheus system." Valern said.

"That shall do for now. What's STG doing now?" Sparatus asked.

"They are preparing to infiltrate the Alliance colony on the other side of the 314-Relay. They will be going as tourist."

"Don't that would alert the Alliance if they so suddenly got

infiltrated after meeting us?" Tevos asked.

"Don't worry, they have strict orders of not killing anyone, and to not infiltrate a military installation. They will try to locate Arcturus Station. If they manage to acquire any military information, then that's a bonus." Valern said with a tone of mischief on his voice.

Sparatus and Tevos nodded at that before leaving for their personal chambers, all the while thinking of their new found problem.

****Time Unknown, Calendar Unknown,**** Unknown Region of Space, Infected Citadel Frigate. ****

On the insides of the Flood controlled ship, a presence was made known. It had finally managed to escape his predecessor killers. He knew that in order to reach his objective he had to wait for the right moment to strike. After all the newly 'Alliance' was more dangerous than 20 years before.

He would wait until he reaches its maximum force before attacking the home worlds of his enemies. With the information regarding his enemies, passed through the mental link by the previous Gravemind, he was more deadly and dangerous than before. He will make sure devoid this galaxy of its impure and violent life before the mechanical beings arrived to start their cycle. He would manage to bring peace to this galaxy and all the surrounding ones.

"The Gravemind was back, and it is more dangerous than before" It said.

****A/N: I'm sorry about the long wait, I have had some problems regarding school and family lately. ****

****Well putting that aside, I would like to hear your opinions about the story so far, even if you say that it doesn't deserves to be posted hehe xD (I'm serious) also any spelling/grammar errors that you find, please let me know so I can correct them. I have already rechecked the story 2 times looking for them but I can't find any more. Also if you could recommend me a Beta Reader I would really appreciate it, the ones that I have sent a request so far, hadn't responded so I'm in need of your help. ****

****Well until next time see ya. ****

6. The Flood, Timeline, STG, and ONI

The Next Great Journey

****A/N: And I'm back with a new chapter. Thanks to everyone who clicked favorite or follow and also to the ones that took the time to post a review. ****

****IMPORTANT NOTICE: I changed the format of the Codex of the story, I think that it will be easier to read and understand it in this new version. So if you want to check it out go ahead. :P****

****Now onto the chapter.****

"Speaking"

'Thoughts'

[Radio Communications, Ground forces-Ground forces, and Ship-Ship]

{Ground to Ship Communications}

Flash back of previous chapter(s)

'_Messages on Screen'_

**Sound Effects**

**Disclaimer: I don't own Halo or Mass Effect, both belong to their respective owners. **

Chapter 6: The Flood, Timeline, STG, and ONI

September 15, 2172, 1327 Hours, Citadel Council Calendar, In Route to Beta-Prometheus System, Turian Dreadnought **_Precise Strike_****. **

Councilor Sparatus was currently in his personal quarters aboard the ship, thinking of the events that transpired after the relationship talks with the Systems Alliance.

He had been sent to check the situation at hand in the Beta-Prometheus system regarding the quarantine status that the Alliance had put it on. 3 days ago, he and the other two councilors had gotten a report from SPECTRE agent Saren Arterius. The report had explained what had happened on the Big Ring, it also contained a detailed explanation about the parasite form known as the Flood.

When he and the other councilors read about it, they were horrified at the prospect that there was a form of life capable of turning your own people against you, turning them into mindless bodies that only wanted to kill or infect others not infected already. After he and the other two councilors finished reading that part of the report, they had continued reading to find out that the Alliance arrived at the system and helped purge the Flood from the ring and the system, as well as helping to evacuate the survivors from the ring before firing a nuke at it.

At that point the councilors thought that their worries had finished without them even having to do anything about it, but then Captain Tristana's report arrived. In there, he and the other councilors found out that one ship infected with the Flood had managed to escape the system towards unknown space.

So after an intense discussion regarding what to do about the current situation, the Council decided to send Sparatus to check the system's situation, and also to try and get more information about the current problem.

"Councilor, we have arrived at the Prometheus system." The VI of the ship said through the intercom.

"Understood, tell the Captain that I'll be on the bridge shortly."
Sparatus responded.

Sparatus sighted to relieve himself of all the stress before putting a calmed expression on his face. He opened the door of his quarters and headed towards the bridge of the ship. On the way, many crew members of the ship saluted him and gave him the respect that he deserved. Truthfully he didn't know if it was because of his past with the military or if it was his status as councilor that gained that kind of respect. He passed through some corridors before arriving at the elevator that would take him to his destination.

The elevator made a stop at the CIC before opening its doors. Sparatus stepped out and headed towards the Captain's position at the front of the bridge.

"Captain." Sparatus greeted. "What's our status?" he asked.

"Councilor, we are currently moving towards the Relay 217B. We should be in range in about 5 minutes." The Captain responded.

"Understood, once there contact the Alliance's ships patrolling the Relay."

"Affirmative Councilor."

Sparatus turned to watch outside of the ship through one of the many windows present while the ship and its escorts moved towards the Relay. Once the ship got close enough of the Relay, he could see on the distance the silhouettes of 5 ships stationed around the Relay. Thanks to the information that the Alliance shared with them regarding the classifications of ships that they had, he could identify that 3 of the ships were one of the variants of the frigates while the other two were also one of the variants of the corvettes.

"Private contact those ships." The Captain ordered.

"Affirmative sir. Transmission is on screen 2."

The Captain and Sparatus turned to watch screen number two. On the screen he saw a Sangheili looking at them.

[Greetings, I'm the acting Captain of the Turian Dreadnought Precise Strike. My ship is transporting Councilor Sparatus to the Beta-Prometheus system on the other side of the Relay. Can we proceed?] The Captain said.

When he had been tasked to transport the Councilor towards the system, he had been informed that it was currently under the Systems Alliance control for security measures. Under protocol he had to ask permission to proceed before entering the system, if not he could be shot at for not following the warnings from the Alliance.

[Understood, wait a minute Captain.] The Sangheili said before turning to talk to someone inside the bridge. [Captain, your ship and its escorts have permission to proceed. Councilor, Admiral Lasky wishes to speak with you once you get to the other

side.]

[Understood.] Sparatus answered.

The Alliance member nodded before cutting the line. Sparatus turned to watch as the Alliance's ships made an opening for the Citadel ships to move through. Once the 5 Council ships moved close to the Relay, they were engulfed by an all too familiar blue ray and then they were sent towards the Beta-Prometheus system.

Some seconds later the _Precise Strike _exited the Relay. Sparatus immediately noticed that the Beta-Prometheus system was swarmed with tens of ships from the Alliance. And just like him, the Captain of the Dreadnought was shocked at the magnitude of the Alliance presence on the system.

'By the spirits! It has only been three days since the Alliance arrived at the system. Could their FTL engines be that fast? Or all this fleet came with the initial insertion group?' Sparatus thought.

'Spirits! The Alliance surely knows how to secure a system, with a fleet of this size nothing could escape their sensors.' The Captain thought.

"Sir. One of the Alliance's ships is contacting us." The Private in charge of communications said.

"Path it through Private." The Captain responded.

"Affirmative. Transmitting to screen 2 sir."

Sparatus and the Captain turned towards said screen. On the screen they could see a Human as well as part of the bridge. And if the symbols on the Human's uniform had the same significance as the ones used by the Hierarchy, Sparatus could tell, that at least, the Human was an Admiral or a Captain.

[Captain, Councilor. I'm Admiral Thomas Lasky and I'm in command of the fleet on the system.] Lasky said, [Councilor I request that you board my ship so we can discuss the recent events that took place on the system. You are welcome to bring any security measures that you see fit.] He said while sending the coordinates of his ship.

[Admiral, thanks for the offer. I'll be boarding your ship in about 30 minutes.] Sparatus responded.

[Understood, hangar B6 is ready for the landing of your shuttle. Lasky out.] And Lasky cut the transmission.

"Councilor, what security team will you take?" The Captain asked.

"I was thinking about bringing a unit of 5 guards with me. Any recommendations Captain?"

"I have a few." The Captain said with a smirk, "They'll be ready to depart once you are aboard the shuttle Councilor."

"Understood." Sparatus said before heading to the elevator of the

CIC.

**September 15, 2574, 1440 Hours, Systems Alliance Calendar,
Beta-Prometheus System, UNSC Class-Infinity Warship
****_Infinity_****. **

Admiral Thomas Lasky was currently in docking bay B6 waiting for the Councilor's shuttle arrival. He was slightly stressed because of the lack of information and status regarding the escaped Flood vessel. The only good news that had come from all the Flood outbreak was that, thanks to ONI and the help of 216-Redeemer, the Systems Alliance R&D department was now working on a way to make Alliance's military ships faster and also to minimize the charging period of time of all their weapons systems.

Lasky sighted to relieve himself of some pressure just as the Councilor's shuttle entered the hangar. The shuttle was trapezoidal in form with two thrusters in the back and front side, it also had one type of weapon in both flanks of the shuttle. It was red and dark silver in color with what Lasky presumed was the Hierarchy symbol in both flanks of the shuttle. If Lasky's memory served him right, he guessed that this was the standard Kodiak shuttle that apparently all the Citadel races liked to use, or so he read in the information provided by ONI.

The Kodiak landed with a small **_THUM_** on the hangar, then from the side a door opened revealing its occupants. Six Turians exited the shuttle with five of them being the security team and the sixth being Councilor Sparatus.

Lasky, flanked by two ODSs, approached the Councilor. He extended his hand for a salute and said, "Councilor, It's a pleasure to have you aboard the _Infinity_."

Sparatus took the offered hand, shaking it in the process. "Admiral. I have to say it, this is an impressive ship."

Lasky just smiled at the compliment, 'If he only knew what this baby can do.' Lasky thought before saying, "Thank you Councilor, now if you could follow me. We have important things to discuss." Sparatus nodded and followed Lasky, his security team not far behind. [Hades could you secure the conference room for our arrival?] Lasky said through his intercom.

[Of course Admiral. It'll be ready before you get to the elevator.] Hades responded.

Some minutes later Lasky's group arrived at the conference room check point. Lasky stepped in front of the door to type the password to open the door. Once the door opened, Lasky and Sparatus moved towards the table on the room, both of them sitting in front of each other. Both security teams moved towards opposite sides of the room to secure their respective VIPs.

"Alright Councilor, I'm guessing that you want to start with what happened or with what exactly the Flood is?" Lasky said.

"I think that first a recount of the events transpired would be better Admiral."

Lasky nodded and proceeded to tell the Councilor what happened since the Alliance arrived at the system. Lasky had received orders from the Arbiter Thel Vadam to not let the Council be aware of him and his ship's presence on the system, so Thel had let Admiral Lasky assume the role that all that happened in the system was under his orders, which also included the detonation of the SHIVA-Class nuke. Sparatus for his part listened to everything that Lasky said with all his attention while at the same time evaluating the events transpired.

"And after we evacuated the remaining survivors from the Halo ring I gave the authorization to deploy and detonate a SHIVA-Class nuclear bomb on the ring to purge the remaining Flood presence." Lasky said.

"I see. While the detonation of the nuke is problematic to say the least, at the time the Alliance hadn't been aware of our agreement regarding nuclear arsenals. And even if the Alliance was aware of it, I doubt that I and the other Councilors would have voted on war or something similar. After all you decided to extract the survivors from the Big Ring and also warn the operational ships in orbit, when you could just proceed to launch the nuke and destroy the infected ships without informing us first." Sparatus said. "Now Admiral what exactly do you mean by saying Halo? And about this Flood threat, what's the danger that could be caused by them in a large scale?"

Just like the previous orders given to Lasky, he also received authorization to reveal all the relevant and unclassified information regarding Halo and the Flood to the Council. "Councilor, the Big Ring is known by the Systems Alliance as Halo. This one here on the system is only one out of seven Halo rings scattered on the entire galaxy, each one of them having only two purposes. One of them is the study of the Flood and its victims, the other is to kill the Flood in a galactic scale."

"Then if that's the case why not activate its secondary purpose so we can get rid of the problem before it becomes a harder one to deal with?" Sparatus asked.

"Because when the Forerunners; which were the ones that constructed the Halo rings; were at war with the Flood approximately 100,000 years ago. They decided to fire the rings, killing in the process every single individual of every species in the galaxy. After that happened their AIs repopulated the galaxy with all its species and then secured the rings. So Councilor, the firing of the ring is only a viable option when everything else has failed to destroy or contain the Flood, and even then it is still a very hard choice to make."

Sparatus for his part was stunned, to learn that there were seven Big Rings with the ability to wipe out all life from a galaxy out there on space, he now learned what real fear felt like. He also noticed that the Admiral talked like if he had had experience with that kind of situation, so he asked. "Admiral, has one of the 'Halos' being fired? And where are the remaining six rings?"

"Don't worry Councilor, in order to activate one or all of the rings you need a special key and also to be recognized by the installation as a Reclaimer. Currently 2 of the rings are under the Systems

Alliance control, the first one that we encountered was destroyed to evict the accidental activation that was taking place. So this reduces the number to three Halo rings that have not been found." Lasky answered, "To answer your first question, yes the Systems Alliance or UEG, UNSC and Separatist Covenant as we were known in the final days of the Human-Covenant war, decided to activate one of the rings in order to kill the Flood in a radius of 250,000 light years."

"I see. Was any species extinguished during the firing of the ring?" Sparatus asked preoccupied.

"While in that time we were desperate to kill the Flood as well as already weakened because of the war, we checked all the red zone of the firing blast before activating the ring. So no Councilor, not a single one species was extinguished after the activation." Lasky reassured.

'Well considering that the firing was on the ark in the middle of dark space, there was nothing to worry about the firing besides getting out of the blast zone.' Lasky thought.

'Thank the Spirits for that.' Sparatus thought. "Okay Admiral, now that we finished with that matter, why exactly the use of a nuke was needed here? And the ship that managed to escape, what actions is the Alliance taking?"

"During our engagements against the Flood we have learned that nuclear and plasma bombardment are the best ways to get rid of all Flood presence in a determined area. Regarding the escaped infected ship, the Alliance is ready to send scout ships to the edge of all Citadel space. Our intelligence branch managed to track the ship to those areas as well as unexplored and dark space, that's where more likely the ship will be. With the Council's permission and approval, we would like to establish patrols in the edges of those zones inside Citadel space." Lasky said.

"That's something that I can't grant by myself, a session between our governments would be needed to decide that, in the meantime the Council will be on alert and also establish patrols. The only problem that I see on here is the Terminus systems." Sparatus answered.

"Why's that?"

"The Terminus Systems is a region of space that is out of Citadel jurisdiction, being the home place to rouge states, criminal bands, and the like. The Alliance and any other Council ships could go and establish patrols in the area but the ships would be at risk of getting attacked and boarded by pirates, mercenaries, and/or slavers."

"I see. Don't worry Councilor we will find a way to circumnavigate that problem."

"Understood Admiral. Now in a better note, the embassy for the Systems Alliance is under construction. We estimate that it will be done by the end of the month, also the Treaty of Farixen has finished its editing. I would like to request a meeting with your government to discuss the final details."

"That's good news Councilor, the Systems Alliance also is almost finished with the Council's embassy. The meeting can proceed in about 5 days if that's okay."

"That'll be perfect Admiral."

Lasky nodded before saying, "One more thing Councilor, the Alliance will now return the system to the Council, but we would leave a security group of five ships on the system for extra protection."

"That's acceptable. Well now that this discussion is done with, I'll better head back to the Citadel. Admiral, thanks for your hospitality."

Lasky nodded and gave Sparatus another handshake before he departed to the hangar.

"Hades contact the Arbiter." Lasky said.

"The Arbiter is on the line sir." Hades said after some seconds.

[Admiral Lasky, I suppose that everything went as planned?] Thel asked.

[Affirmative, the Council will help with our search of the Flood vessel. Also I managed to acquire some information. It appears that there's a part of space where our ships could operate without any interference from the Citadel. It is known as the Terminus systems.] Lasky responded.

[Good work Admiral. Let's prepare the Fleet to leave the system, Arbiter out.] Thel then cut the line.

Lasky proceeded to head back to the bridge, on his way he thought again of the mitting and the possible effects that it will have in the future. 'It appears that we are back in 1950, the only difference being the scale of this new cold war.' Lasky thought.

****Short Timeline****

****September 15, 2172/2574: ****Councilor Sparatus meets with the Systems Alliance's forces on the Beta-Prometheus system in order to discuss recent events.

****September 16, 2172/2574: ****The Systems Alliance leaves the Beta-Prometheus system to return to Arcturus Station and respective posts. A battle group of 3 CPV-Class heavy Destroyers, and 2 Stalwart Class Frigates stays for extra security of the system.

****September 18, 2172/2574: ****Councilor Sparatus arrives at the Citadel and proceeds to inform the other two Councilors of the discussion that he had with Admiral Lasky. Tevos and Valern for their part are speechless at the prospect that there are 5 remaining Big Rings out of their jurisdiction and control, each one capable of wiping all form of sentient and sapient life in a radius of 250,000 light years. Valern tasks STG to look for any information regarding who the Reclaimers are and what's their purpose, as well as to locate

the remaining Big Rings. An increase of Loyalist Covenant presence and attacks are reported at Systems Alliance's borders and outer colonies.

****September 20, 2172/2574:**** 5 Ships from the Systems Alliance arrive at the Citadel to transport the Councilors and their ship's escorts to Arcturus Station. Because of security measures all Citadel ships dock on the Alliance's ships and the ones that can't dock because of size, use a slipspace portal of an Alliance ship as FTL method.

****September 20, 2172/2574: ****After 9 hours on slipstream, the Alliance and Council arrives at Arcturus Station. The Councilors at seeing the magnitudes of the station are awestruck at its size and complexity of the structure. The Systems Alliance and the Citadel Council have a public meeting where they show the specifics of the treaty of Farixen and the exact commerce routes between both governments. The treaty of Farixen establishes that in case that the Alliance needs to have a military presence on any part of Citadel space (Because they established a colony, persecution of a highly dangerous criminal, etc.) they are allowed to have 1 CAS-Class Assault Carrier, 5 CCS-Class Battlecruisers, 5 UNSC Class-Infinity Warships, and 7 CPV-Class Heavy Destroyers, any other type of military ship is permitted if they don't exceed more of 30 ships, unless they have a colony(s) established. ****Noted that the Citadel Council isn't aware that the Systems Alliance possess CSO-Class Super Carriers. ****Also if a Systems Alliance's colony inside Citadel space (if any) is attacked and reinforcements are needed, the Alliance can send any number and type of warships to retake the colony. This last condition can only be applied if the Alliance is willing to help the other Citadel species in similar situations if they ask for their help. The Systems Alliance accepts this terms. Also the Systems Alliance and Citadel Council agree to establish check points in opposite sides of relay 314. (On Citadel space is a Systems Alliance checkpoint of 5 ships. On Systems Alliance space is a Citadel checkpoint of 5 ships.) Only frigate sized ships are part of the checkpoint. Also during the session the Systems Alliance decides to adopt the Citadel credit as their new economic monetary system in order to facilitate trade between both factions.

****September 21, 2172/2574: ****The Systems Alliance and Citadel Council have a private meeting regarding the Flood. The Citadel Council lets the Systems Alliance help with the patrols in Council's outer borders, but only SDV-Class Corvettes and scout ships are permitted. High-Com informs and warns the Council about the newly increase of Loyalist Covenant presence and attacks.

****September 22, 2172/2574:**** Official trade with the Systems Alliance and Council races begins. This new trade door is predicted to cause an increase of economic wealth of about 10% in all Council races by the end of the year. Also the Systems Alliance increase the number of defenses and ships protecting Phoenix and the Deca-5 system.

****September 25, 2172/2174:**** The R&D department of ONI with the help of 216-Redeemer manages to find a way to increase the velocity of the Systems Alliance's ships by 30% (It's estimated that in 5 months all Systems Alliance military ships will have the new actualization. Arcturus Defense Fleet is the priority as well as all capital ships.), also R&D is still working in a way to decrease the charging

time of all weapons in warships.

****September 27, 2172/2574: ****STG agents prepare an operation to obtain information regarding the Systems Alliance's combat capabilities. (Weapons designs, warships real capabilities, and military bases) The first phase of the operation will take place the 3rd of October in the colony of Phoenix. At the same time ONI prepares GHOST team for a mission to get any classified and non-classified information regarding the Terminus Systems and weapons designs by the Citadel. The operation will be under the codename LIBRERIANWEB and it will take place on October 4th on the Citadel station.

****September 29, 2172/2574:**** An increase of Systems Alliance population is viewed on the Citadel, approximately 15,000 civilians move to the Station. The same can be said of the Colony of Phoenix, which has now a population of 30,000 Council species population. Approximately 20% of the population is Dell because of the similitudes that Phoenix has with their home world.

****October 2, 2172/2574: ****Salarian scientists' report that it would take them approximately 1.5-3 years to adapt slipspace capabilities to Frigate sized ships.

****Present, October 3, 2172, 1540 Hours, Citadel Council Calendar, Deca-5 System, in route to Phoenix Colony, Civilian Merchant Vessel.****

Ulrn Irbani, one member of the three Salarian team of STGs sent to carry on the secret operation ordered by Councilor Valern himself, was currently on the cargo bay of the civilian merchant vessel in route towards an Alliance colony with his other two companions.

All three of them were currently preparing their equipment for the mission, which consisted of infiltrating a weapons factory on one of the cities and download the localization of where the weapons crates are being sent. Also any information regarding the schematics of said weapons was a secondary objective of the operation.

Ulrn was inspecting a box like thing that in fact was a hacking unit. Its purpose was to distract a highly efficient VI long enough so the main hacking system can download all the relevant information before getting blocked. Ulrn honestly didn't know if the hacking unit would work against an AI but it will hopefully give them enough time to download the information.

"Alright. All equipment is in working condition. Civilian ship should land in 10 minutes on the hospital's landing platform." The leader of the team, Lerbant Ilsi, said while showing a holographic image of the city. "We would mix between the population until we reach the factory. It is 5 kilometers north from the hospital. Shouldn't take long if we use local transportation on the streets. Once we are at two streets from the factory, we will enter the sewers and move towards one of the maintenance tunnels that is connected to the sewer. We will access the factory from down there. The scans made by the drones deployed by the current team on the surface, had traced a route that will take us directly under the assembly line. We would need to find a terminal and download the information. The extraction route will be through the sewers again. The other STG team will wait for us in one Human car for pickup." He stopped to observe the nods

of affirmation of the other two members of the team.

"We should take our camouflage units. That way we have more chances of infiltrating undetected." Uliarn said, seeing as the other two STGs nodded their approval.

"Now here's the important part. We can't let anyone detect us. That means no killing or neutralizing someone. Understood?"

The other two Salarrians nodded at that, before the third member of the team, Nuzop Lozoma, asked, "Sir. If we are detected what happens?"

"Then that could cause one of two things. One, we cause a war between the Citadel and the Systems Alliance because of stealing of military information. Or two, we are labeled as traitors and terrorist and then we are executed by Citadel law in order to prevent a war." Ilsi responded.

"Understood sir. Failure not an option."

After some minutes the civilian vessel landed at the hospital. Immediately the crew of the merchant vessel started to download the shipment towards the hospital while others loaded medical supplies from the hospital. Meanwhile, Ilsi and his team exited the shuttle undetected and moved towards the street, after walking around the city with a multitude of various species, both of Citadel and Alliance space, they arrived at a bus stop.

The three Salarrians boarded the bus and then waited until arriving at their destination. On the way towards the fabric, they observed the city. The three Salarrians noted that the Alliance favored rounded and cubic constructions over cone like constructions that resembled both Asari and Salarrians worlds. They also noted that the Alliance, just like the Hierarchy, preferred to make their buildings with multiple entrances/exits. 'Maybe we should adopt that construction technic. It will help to evacuate a building faster in case of an emergency.' Ilsi thought.

Some minutes later the STG team arrived at their destination. Disembarking the bus, they proceeded to walk towards their insertion point. Once they got close to one entry of the sewers, the three STG members removed the sewer tap and entered, closing the entrance behind them.

Ilsi took out a map and proceeded to move through the multiple tunnels. After many turns and putting up with a really bad smell, they finally arrived at their entry point. Lozoma took out a binocular like thing that projected a sonic image of a determined zone. In this case the assembly line part of the factory.

"I can see at least three operators up there sir." Lozoma informed.

"Understood. Uliarn any sound waves detected up there?" Ilsi asked.

"Affirmative. Reproducing audio." Uliarn said while pressing the play button on his consol.

"Hey Donovan, at what time is our lunch again?"

"For god's sake Andres I already told you. IT'S IN FIVE MINUTES."

"Sorry, but I'm hungry. If I don't eat something now I'm going to make an error in putting the right coordinates for shipments in the cargo."

"Just concentrate in your work."

The STG members just looked at each other, not sure of what to make of the conversation up there. After some five or so minutes, Lozoma reported that the operatives were leaving the room. Acting fast, Ilsi opened the maintenance tunnel entry tap and he and the other two STG entered the assembly line room with their camouflage units on.

"Can any of you see any terminal nearby?" Ilsi asked.

"Affirmative. Starting download of information now." Uliarn said while plugging in his hacking unit. "Hmm it appears that this factory only has VIs as a defense system."

"Would it be a problem?" Ilsi said while checking one of the weapons in the crates. The rifle, if it was a rifle, looked like a derivation of the Pulse Rifle that the Geth infantry liked to use. He read the tag on the crate, thanks to the help of the translators in their neural implants, and saw that it was marked as, 'T51 DER/1-Plasma Repeater'.

"Negative." Uliarn responded, then after some minutes he said, "Sir, download complete. I managed to get the coordinates of two shipment locations as well as schematics for some of the weapons manufactured here."

"Understood. Let's leave. I'll take this for further analysis and testing." Ilsi said while signaling the Plasma Repeater.

The three STG agents entered back to the maintenance tunnel just as the employees of the fabric returned to their posts. After some minutes of moving through the tunnels Ilsi contacted the second team. [Second team do you copy? Team one here. Over.]

[Team one we copy you. Are you at the extraction point yet?]

[Negative. We should arrive in two minutes. What's the extraction vehicle like?]

[A blue extended vehicle. Has a capacity for 7 passengers. Can't miss it we are in a perpendicular position with the alley. Over.]

[Understood. See you once we arrive. Over.]

The three Salarrians hurried up towards the exit. Once they arrived at the stair that would take them towards the outside world, the three immediately climbed up. Ilsi was the first to get out, camouflage activated, he then spotted their extraction vehicle to his right side. Once Uliarn and Lozoma exited the sewer, Ilsi signaled them

through the radio, and the three boarded the vehicle.

"How was your mission?" One member of team two asked.

"A success. I even managed to get one of their weapons undetected. This will accelerate the new personal shield unit project." Ilsi replied.

The other Salarian nodded and accelerated out of the zone towards their headquarters in the city. Ilsi in the meantime sent a report of the mission to Councilor Valern.

****October 3, 2172, 2000 Hours, Citadel Council Calendar, Widow System, Presidium, Council Personal Chambers.****

In the other side on the galaxy, the Council once again was discussing the new developments and the possible ramifications of this events. Valern was currently finished the report of the STG mission.

"We should send a SPECTRE in charge of the extraction. That's the only viable way of getting the STGs out without compromising the cargo." Sparatus said.

"I agree, that way we don't have to worry about leaks of information. But who should we send?" Tevos asked.

"Nihlus, he's the most qualified agent for this kind of operation." Sparatus said.

"Then it's settled. Nihlus shall carry on this assignment. I'll make sure that he gets the required information for the mission." Valern said.

"This success will surely improve our technology to match that of the Alliance." Sparatus said.

"It surely will. But it will still take us years, even decades to fully develop the new shield technology for both our ground and space forces." Valern said.

"Then we should start looking for more allies that can help us Valern." Tevos said.

"Who else in the galaxy could help us? There are very few qualified technicians for this class of project. Let alone the fact that they will probably sell the information to the Terminus systems."

"That's assuming we enlist the help of someone who has ties with the Terminus." Tevos said.

"Then who do you have in mind Tevos?" Sparatus asked.

"The Quarrians. They are the most qualified species for this type of assignment. We just need to give them something in exchange for their silence and services."

The other two Councilors looked at her with expressions of shock. They had never thought that Councilor Tevos would consider that option in a problem like this one.

'This is surprising. Of all the people that I thought would recommend something like that, Tevos would not be in that list. But that could work in our favor if we play our cards right with the Quarrians.'

Valern thought.

'So it appears that Tevos is finally getting an edge in espionage and warfare tactics, maybe Valern and I are a bad influence in her.'

Sparatus thought. He then looked towards Valern and saw that he was nodding in approval at the suggestion.

"Hmm, that will definitely work, we can end their exile and give them a pair of planets to settle. If we make the situation look like they need us more than we need them, they will definitely accept our offer." Sparatus concluded.

"Then it is settled. I'll arrange a meeting with their Admirals."

Tevos said.

****October 4, 2174, 1000 Hours, Systems Alliance Calendar, Widow System, Citadel Station, Zakera Ward.****

Francis Tomson, leader of GHOST team, was in the market section of the Zakera ward on the Citadel, posing as one of the many tourists in the station. He was currently in one of the many restaurants eating something when his data pad beeped. He took it out of his pocket and looked at the message displayed on the screen.

'_We have green light to proceed with Phase 1 of operation LIBRERIANWEB. Contact our agent in the industrial district on the Citadel. Identification Phrase: __Lake Water__. Identification Response: __Freshwater__. Delete message once you are finished reading it. _

T.I.M. ONI Section III.'

Once Francis finished reading the message, he erase it and then put his data pad back in his pocket. He finished eating his food to keep appearances and then stood up, moving towards one of the many transit stations on the ward.

[GHOST leader here. GHOST team do you copy?] Francis said through his communicator.

[GHOST 2 here. I read you GHOST 1.]

[GHOST 3 here. What's the situation?]

[GHOST 4 here. I read you GHOST leader.]

[Understood, we have the green light to start phase 1 of operation LIBRERIANWEB. I'm currently moving towards the industrial district to contact an agent for more information. I want all of you to be ready and wait close to the Alliance embassy on the Presidium.]

[Understood we will be there.] GHOST 2 responded.

[GHOST leader out.] Francis cut the transmission just as the transportation vehicle arrived.

He got inside the vehicle, noting that the inside resembled that of a 21st century Lamborghini, except with a more alien touch to it. He also noticed that the driver was a Salarian, an eager Salarian it appeared.

"To the industrial district please." Francis said.

The Salarian nodded and accelerated out of the ward. During the travel the curiosity of the Salarian got the better of him and started to ask Francis about the Systems Alliance. Luckily for him it was only general knowledge, like what's the culture of each species of the Alliance like, art tendencies, and a little bit of history about the members of the Alliance. Francis responded to each of the questions to the best of his knowledge, but in the end he decided to give him a copy of the Systems Alliance civilian codex.

Once the vehicle arrived at the industrial district, Francis paid the Salarian for the service and then started to walk towards one of the many fabrics in the zone. During the way he received another message on his data pad, this one with a set of coordinates. He deleted again the message after plugging in the coordinates in his UPS (Universal Positioning System) unit.

He started to move towards the marked position, passing on the way many different fabrics. Some of them were of vehicle construction, others were of basic services like electricity and water supplies. After walking for about 10 minutes, Francis finally spotted a tall figure close to one of the lakes in the district. The being was a Sangheili, but what distinguished him was the robe that he was using. 'Some kind of civilian attire.' Francis concluded.

Once he approached him, Francis said. "Lake Water."

The Sangheili turned to look at him and then responded, "Freshwater. I suppose that you are the operative?"

Francis just smiled and then responded. "And you are my team's agent then?"

The Sangheili nodded and then indicated Francis to follow him. The both of them moved through the side of the lake. "Your team will infiltrate and hack one of the Councilor's terminals in the session chamber on the Presidium. We have a contact on the Alliance embassy that will provide a distraction that way C-Sec will be distracted long enough to at least let one member of your team move inside the chamber undetected."

"Understood, what are our windows of entry and opportunity?"

"The distraction will happen once you give me the code BREACH. You will have a mission margin of 10 minutes, after that you and your team are on your own." The Sangheili said while giving Francis his communication frequency.

"What happens if we don't make it or we are discovered?"

"If your team doesn't make it, then we would fail and we will have to wait for another window, and High-Com and ONI will be mad at you. If you are discovered, the Alliance will negate any knowledge of this

mission and will label your team as traitors and terrorist, after that you will be falling under Citadel regulations and probably the death penalty. Once you finish the mission move towards Deck 14, a civilian transport will be waiting for you."

"Understood." Francis said and then left the area to go to the Presidium. Once he arrived 30 minutes later, he moved towards the Alliance embassy where the rest of his team was waiting between the multitudes of people.

[GHOST team what's your status?] Francis asked.

[We are ready to proceed at your mark sir.] Yeg, GHOST 2 said.

[Understood, GHOST 2 and 3 you will be with me keeping over watch outside the session's chamber. GHOST 4 you will enter and hack one of the Councilors terminals. Focus on finding all confidential and non-confidential information of the Terminus systems. You will have 10 minutes after that we are on our own.]

[Understood.] GHOST 4 or G4 said.

[GHOST leader here. BREACH.] Francis said to the ONI agent.

At first nothing happened but then inside the Alliance embassy, someone started to cough and then it dropped to floor still coughing furiously. C-Sec acted immediately, they moved inside the embassy and started to check on the assistant of the Alliance representative.

"Someone call medical help immediately!" One of the Turians yelled.

No sooner he said that, doctors started arriving while C-Sec contained the crowd.

[G4 now, this is your window.] Francis said while moving towards the embassy, acting like one of the many civilians.

G4 moved towards the stairs leading to the session chamber, the guards already between the crowd to try and contain it. Once he arrived at the locked door of the chamber, he put in practice his hacking skills using the Omnitool that he had bought once he arrived at the Citadel. 5 seconds later, the door turned green and then it opened. Moving inside and up towards the ceiling, G4 moved to the far side of the chamber undetected.

Once on top of the podium that the Councilors used during the sessions, he isolated the systems of the terminal that he was going to hack before connecting his hacking unit. Once all the process was finished, the download of archives started without alerting any kind of systems security.

[G4 here. GHOST leader what's the situation out there?]

[It's under control, medical attention managed to stabilize the assistant of the representative. It appears that he consumed an intoxication pill simulator. But the doctors think that it was intoxication by food or drink. What's the status of the hacking?]

G4 turned to look at the screen and then answered, [92.5% complete without any complications.]

[Understood, hurry up you got 3 minutes before C-Sec returns to full guard duty.]

[Noted. I'll be done before that, GHOST 4 out.]

After cutting the transmission G4 turned to watch the screen of the terminal, waiting until the download finished. Once it finished 2 minutes later, he proceeded to move towards the exit door with his camouflage active. Once outside the chamber he moved towards the dissipating multitude, deactivating the camouflage between the crowd without alerting them.

[GHOST leader, part one of phase one was a success.] G4 informed.

[Copy that. GHOST team move towards Deck 14, our transport is there waiting for us.] Francis said.

The rest of GHOST team acknowledged and moved separately towards the deck. Once they arrived at Deck 14 and passing the security scanners and checkpoint, they boarded the civilian transport where the Sangheili agent was waiting for them. He then guided GHOST team towards the communications room on the ship.

The Civilian ship took out of the Citadel and started to move towards the Slipspace point of arrival and exit for the Alliance. That point was set up in one of the sectors of the system to evict any kind of accident between ships entering the Widow System. Once it arrived there, the ship opened a portal and then proceeded to enter through the void of slipspace towards a system in between relays where an ONI prowler was waiting for them.

"Good job Gunnery Sergeant Tomson, ONI will be pleased with the results of the mission." A voice said inside the communications room of the ship.

Francis looked inside the room where in the holographic communications systems was the form of none other than one of the most known directors in ONI. The Illusive Man, or T.I.M for short, was greeting them.

Francis and the rest of his team saluted at their superior, "Sir."

"At ease operative, I'm just calling to make sure that the mission was a success and to get the information."

Francis nodded and then signaled G4 to send the information downloaded. T.I.M. looked at a terminal on his side and then nodded to the team before disconnecting the line.

Francis and his team left the room to go get some shut eye time while waiting to arrive at their destination. They knew that this operation was the first of many that will mark the course of the Systems Alliance in this new era.

**October 5, 2574, 0800 Hours, System Alliance
Calendar,***Reincarnation System, Arcturus Station.**

The Illusive Man, which was his codename on ONI, was currently in the presence of all the members of High-Com. The reason that he was here in their presence, was to inform them of what ONI found in the downloaded information as well as some of his ideas to deal with some current and future problems that the Alliance (will) has(have).

"Alright Tim, what's your report?" Lord Admiral Hood asked.

"Admiral, ONI has discovered some interesting facts about the Terminus Systems. And thanks to that information, we now know what the best course of action would be for the Alliance."

"In that case Tim, what can you tell us that it is of relevance?" Arbiter Thel Vadam asked.

"First you need to understand that the Terminus Systems is like Australia in the times of the English Empire. There is no place in all that sector of space where there aren't any criminal or mercenary of some kind. So if we want to operate safely, or as safely as you can get in there, we have to negotiate with the highest group in the sector."

"And who would that be?" Hood asked.

"Aria T'Loak, the self-proclaimed queen of Omega. She has the biggest control in the Terminus and also has what we call the dark version of the Citadel. If we can send someone to negotiate a treaty with her, we could operate in the Terminus without any restrictions from the Citadel because that zone of space is out of their jurisdiction."

"And why would we want to negotiate with a lord criminal, just to operate there with little problems?" Hood asked with a raised eyebrow, showing curiosity.

"Because ONI has detected the infected Flood ship close to the outer borders of the Terminus', and also because if we have Aria as an ally, it could be easier to contact and contract the three main mercenary bands on the system."

"Okay I get the first point, is a really good reason to go ahead with the plan to exterminate the Flood, but mercenary bands? Why would be using them?" Thel asked.

"Because Arbiter, the Councilors will sooner or later start suspecting of us because of all our dark operations in their space. We need to give them someone to blame, someone that the Citadel can persecute. The mercenaries would be the front of such organization that will act as a decoy to hide the Alliance and ONI."

"So you are suggesting that we create that organization to just use it as a decoy?" Jason Paterson, the leader of ONI asked.

"Not just to use it as a decoy, but to also focus on gathering information and supervising the operations performed on all Citadel

space. That will help ONI, because section III already is too stretched trying to locate the exact position of the Flood's ship, performing operations on Citadel space, keeping an eye for any Loyalist covenant activity, trying to locate the Janus key and investigating the Protheans that apparently no one knows anything about besides that they disappeared 50,000 years ago and that they built the Relays and the Citadel. If we create this organization, it will liberate resources from ONI's section III that can focus on the Flood, the Loyalist Covenant, and the Janus key."

"Clever like always TIM." Jason said while chuckling. "Then if we are going with this plan, what is it that you need, and what would be the margin of your operations?"

"I'll need just one fleet, it only has to be composed of some destroyers and frigates, and also I'll be needing at least 15 stealth prowlers. Operatives and specialist in different kinds of fields. Resources to construct a base for the organization, I already have a system in mind. Now our operation will be subjected to stablish relationships with the Terminus systems, as well as conducting operations on Citadel space, from which High-Com and ONI will be notified before carrying them on. And finally we will investigate more on the Protheans."

"Any particular reason that you have interest in that last one?" Hood asked.

"Something doesn't add up with the information known about the Protheans. The Citadel archeologist know that they had an empire in their golden age, but then they suddenly disappeared without leaving any skeleton in any of their cities. Beacons and remnants of their civilization is all that it's left of them. I personally think that either, they left the galaxy or that they went to war and loosed badly. If it's the second then maybe the ones responsible for their extinction could still be around without anyone knowing about it."

The rest of High-Com looked at each other, considering TIM's words and ideas. It was no secret that they also believed that the information about the Protheans was a little bit off but they couldn't do anything suspicious with the Citadel keeping an eye in them when they are inside Citadel space. After some silent moments Hood looked at TIM and then said.

"Alright TIM, you can carry on your operation but I want weekly reports in my desk and also I want to know everything that you find out in your operations."

"The only condition that I have is that I want daily reports in my desk." Jason said.

"Of course, I'll make sure personally that you get them."

"Have you thought of a name for this organization that will serve as a decoy?" Thel asked.

TIM just smiled at that before responding, "CERBERUS, just like the mythological creature, CERBERUS will be the protector and first defense of the Alliance and ONI on the espionage camp."

****Age of Resurrection, Loyalist Covenant Calendar,**** Resurgence
****System, Aboard CSO-Class Super Carrier ****_Vengeance
Coming_****.****

Jul M'Dama, also known as the Supreme Commander of the Loyalist forces, was moving towards the observatory deck of his ship. He had received word that the current leader of the Loyalist Covenant, the Grand Hierarch of Vengeance, wanted to see him.

He arrived at the door which was flanked by a pair of Honor Guards in their red-gold armor, when the door opened he entered and immediately kneeled in front of the Hierarch.

"Grand Hierarch, did you called for my presence?"

"In did I did Jul. Based on current events I have determined that it is time to start our plan against the Humans and all those Heretics." Vengeance said while moving around the room in his gravity throne.

The room was an oval purple one, decorated with a ceremonial presence. The largest wall of the room replaced by a reinforced window that gave the view of space. And in the center stood a circular projector, used to observe ongoing battles in space and in the surface, but also in the side to the projector, the Janus key lay there, floating in an anti-gravity platform.

"Do you think it wise your magnificence? The Jiralhanae had already almost become extinct fighting against the newly Alliance following the Great War."

"The difference Supreme Commander is that we would not overestimate our enemy just like the fools of Truth, Mercy, and Regret alongside the Jiralhanae did in the final months of the war. The Alliance is a powerful enemy, and we would treat it as such, we will attack their colonies one by one, forcing their forces to stretch in order to send our main force towards the Alliance strongholds. And once they are crippled enough, we would strike them with everything that we have exterminating that pest in one last move."

"The Alliance will fall at the mighty power of our forces, no prisoners and no mercy will be granted."

"Don't get ahead of yourself Supreme Commander, because we have to capture the one responsible for many of our soldiers' deaths during the Great War, the Demon responsible for our loss. We need the one known as Spartan 117 alive in order to find the secrets of the Janus key. Focus on finding the other half of the key, then bring me the Demon alive."

"It will be done as you request Hierarch."

"The Alliance will not know what hit them, because once they find out what's happening our Vengeance will be complete." Vengeance said with a devious smirk.

****Close to Starting the next Cycle, Reapers Calendar, The Sea of Storms System.****

In one of the most desolated parts of space, a space station floated

in the middle of the empty system, its design appearing a gigantic H. It was surrounded by at least a hundred ships, from which all of them where of Geth design. But in the middle of the formation a massive ship, measuring approximately 2.5 Km long and using what probably was the most advanced technology in the galaxy. This ship was known to the Geth forces as Nazara or the Old Machine.

Sovereign, as it will let itself known to the organic population of the galaxy, was currently analyzing all the information obtained in the past days. He had found out that a new player was on the galaxy, but this one wielded offensive and defensive technology that was in par with the one that he wielded. The Systems Alliance was a wild card that could stop the cycle if not performed cautiously.

He like the rest of the Reapers knew what the potential of the Alliance could be, and it was one that made them skip 2 cycles 150,000 years ago, when the Forerunners were at the golden age of their empire. If it wasn't for the Flood, it is possible that the Reapers could have been destroyed just like the Flood was approximately 100,000 years ago. But he also knew that Flood was once again around, the attack on one Citadel colony had proved that.

Sovereign sent a message to the Reapers in dark space, informing them of the Systems Alliance and the Flood. If the Reapers acted now, they would have great losses and would probably get themselves extinct, no they would wait and make new plans to continue this cycle. Nothing could stop the salvation that the Reapers brought upon the Organic and Synthetic population of the galaxy, the cycle of extinction will continue and nothing can stop it.

****A/N:** Well here's the end of this chapter. Now IMPORTANT the codex's format of this story has been changed so I recommend to read it, it is easier now. Also I have concluded that I will be able to post every 1-2 weeks at least once. Now please review, I want to know your opinions of the story, even if you think that it is a piece of S*** (Something). Well until next update.**

7. Allies or Partners?

The Next Great Journey

****A/N:** And I'm back with a new chapter. Thanks to everyone who clicked favorite or follow and also to the ones that took the time to post a review. **

****IMPORTANT NOTICE:** I changed the format of the Codex of the story, I think that it will be easier to read and understand it in this new version. So if you want to check it out go ahead. :P It has been updated to current events in the story.**

****WARNING:** This chapter contains some swearing, nothing major to some readers but to others it could be somewhat insulting. Just remember that I warned you in case you want to accuse me of something hehe xD.
**

****Now onto the chapter.****

"Speaking"

'Thoughts'

[Radio Communications, Ground forces-Ground forces, and Ship-Ship]

{Ground to Ship Communications}

Flash back of previous chapter(s)

'_Messages on Screen'_

'**Sound Effects**'

**Disclaimer: I don't own Halo or Mass Effect, both belong to their respective owners. **

Chapter 7: Allies or Partners?

October 5, 2172, 1600 Hours, Citadel Council Calendar, Voyager Cluster, in route to Relay-314, Personal SPECTRE Shuttle.

SPECTRE agent Nihlus Kryik, one of the best agents that the Citadel had in the SPECTRES regiment, was currently piloting his personal shuttle towards the Alliance's checkpoint on Relay-314. His mission was to extract a group of STG agents, with precious cargo, undetected through the border's checkpoint. His plan was a simple one, cross the checkpoint on the Voyager Cluster, land on the colony of Phoenix, contact the STG group, wait a few days, and then leave the system with a scanner jammer to evict the detection of the cargo.

The jammer was developed by STG in order to disguise the signature of any kind of cargo, it made the one using the scanner see nothing, not even a thermal image of the object being jammed.

Nihlus looked towards the Alliance's checkpoint, noticing that it was composed of 3 Stalwart Frigates and 2 SDV Light Corvettes. The 5 ships were stationed at 50,000 km from the Relay, (You need to be at 30,000 km in order for the Relay to send you towards its sister Relay) all of the ships maintaining formation and weapons at 30% just in case someone has any funny ideas.

The shuttle approached the checkpoint, once it was at 20,000 km from it, Nihlus received an incoming transmission. [Unidentified shuttle hold position, you are approaching Systems Alliance's space. State your intentions or leave through sector 3.] One officer of the Alliance said.

[Personal Shuttle here. I'm Nihlus Kryik, I'm a tourist planning on visiting the Alliance's colony on the other side. Over.]

[Understood. Stand by for a moment please.]

[Affirmative.]

Nihlus relaxed and waited until the Alliance made its scans. Some minutes later he received the green light to proceed. The shuttle took off towards the Relay until a familiar blue energy engulfed the shuttle, sending it towards the Deca-5 system.

Once on the Deca-5 system, Nihlus speeded towards the colony of Phoenix. Now everything that he had to do was lay low on the colony for a few days and then leave with the STG group and the cargo towards an STG base.

****October 8, 2574, 1800 Hours, Systems Alliance Calendar, On Slip-Space, in route to Omega Station, Stealth Prowler **_**Early Arrival**_**. ****

Captain Ronald Foley observed the bridge of his ship, every member of the crew was in his/her station, ready to respond to any kind of situation. Foley had received a notification from ONI stating that his ship and its crew were now part of a sub-organization of ONI, called CERBERUS. But because the base that will serve as the headquarters of the new organization was still under construction and also because ONI was still searching for more candidates to be part of the organization, his ship still responded to ONI and High-Command directly.

He also received orders to make a deal with Aria T'Loak in order to facilitate future operations on the Terminus Systems. He also had orders to do whatever it takes to prevent anyone that was a non-Systems Alliance member from getting technology from the Alliance not proposed on the deal. So the contingency plan that Foley had, needed to be something drastic, something that showed that no one could fuck with the Alliance and escape with its hands clean.

The plan was a simple one, the ship would stay cloaked all the time that it was present on the Terminus while Captain Foley and a squad of Phantom operatives, the newly created security force by ONI, discussed the terms of the deal with Aria. If Captain Foley died or was forced into a meld with any Asari during his stay on Omega, the prowler will detonate a SHIVA nuclear warhead missile in the station, after that it would leave the system. If for any reason the prowler could not make it off the system, then it was to detonate the second SHIVA aboard the ship to assure its self-destruction.

"Randal, how much time left to arrive to Omega?" Foley asked the new AI of the ship.

"5 minutes 37 seconds sir. Also I would like to suggest to activate stealth mode now, unless you want to make ourselves known?" Randal responded with a slight smirk.

"Do it." Foley said. Randal nodded before fading away in the systems of the ship to activate the stealth systems.

"Pilot be prepared to take the ship as closest as you can to the station once we have exited Slip-Space."

"Affirmative Captain."

"Lieutenant Swakt send a message to Phantom squad Alfa, tell them to report to the hangar. Also be prepared to hack the communications systems of the station."

"Understood Shipmaster." Swakt responded.

"Sir we are out of Slip-Space, stealth systems are active. We are

invisible in all aspects sir, heading towards Omega." The pilot reported.

"Randal, give me image of the system. I want to know everything that is on this sector. Also start scanning the system."

"Showing image sir." Randal responded while appearing in the console with the system displayed.

On the holographic representation of the system, the position of the Prowler and the rest of the ships, planets, asteroids, and other things on the system appeared. Foley identified Omega immediately, being the only station constructed in an asteroid on the system was hard to miss. The station was just inside the asteroid belt on the system, which offered a great defensive position in space, it was also surrounded by a fleet of 50 ships, all of them of different designs.

The Prowler approached unnoticed towards the station from what telemetry marked as the bottom part of the station. The pilot of the ship had to maneuver the Prowler between some asteroids to evict any disruption on the cloaked systems. Once it was close to the station Foley gave the order to Swakt to start hacking the communication systems of Omega.

"Sir, we have a direct connection with Aria's personal console. Do you want me to start the transmission?" Swakt asked some minutes after the hacking started.

"Affirmative, let's say hi to them. Randal, block any kind of tracking systems in the station. Keep the ship hidden from them in all spectrums."

"Already doing it Captain, also full scans of the system is ready. There's a second relay in the system but the energy signatures are different from the ones that we have encountered." Randal responded.

"Hmm interesting. Send the information to ONI, they'll want to know about this."

"Shipmaster, we are connected to their communications."

"Understood, pass the transmission to my data-pad." Foley said as he moved towards the hangar.

****October 8, 2172, 1845 Hours, Citadel Council Calendar, Omega Nebula, Omega Station, Afterlife.****

"Get this scum out of my station now." Aria T'Loak, the queen of Omega, ordered to no one in particular.

She had just finished dealing with some members of the Blood Pack that were stupid enough to try and steal one transport containing weapons for Aria's organization.

'It appears that some individuals still don't understand the only rule on Omega.' She thought while one guard took the surviving mercenary outside. She had just allowed him to live because that particular member of the Blood Pack had revealed some interesting

information about operations performed by the Blue Suns and Eclipse, information that could be useful at a later day with the mercenary bands.

She allowed herself to relax for a minute in her couch on the balcony overlooking Afterlife. The music seemed to give a relaxed but weary atmosphere today, it made you feel alert but at the same time at peace with your current situation. She watched as some drunk Turians started a fight on the bar only to be thrown outside the club by a Krogan. The dancers of the club offering her services to everyone who had enough money to afford such pleasantries.

"Aria, there's an incoming transmission through your terminal." Garka, one of the top henchmen of Aria, informed her.

"What do you mean that a transmission made its way to MY terminal?" She said with a raised eyebrow.

"Someone managed to hack our communication systems. I'm already triangulating the location of the source." Garka said while looking in an adjacent terminal for the location of the hacker.

"You better find how someone managed to hack into our systems." She said while looking at her terminal.

In the terminal was only a note on the screen saying that she had received a message. Aria opened the message, curious to see who was responsible for this. It said, _'Hello Aria, I have heard that if someone wants to make some specific kind of operations, you are the one to talk to. Am I correct in assuming that?' _

She re-read the message again to make sure that she didn't miss anything important in the short message. 'So someone wants to make business with me then, but who is this individual, and how did he/she managed to hack into this frequency?' Aria thought. "Garka, have you found the source of the transmission?"

"Negative, something is blocking me. I can't triangulate its exact position. If you could keep him or her on the line long enough I could track the source." Garka suggested.

Aria only nodded and then responded, _'Of what kind of operations are we talking about? And who are you?' _She wrote then waited a few seconds for some kind of response.

'_Operations corresponding to some liberties to move in the Terminus', also a guarantee that our operations won't be disturbed by no one under your jurisdiction, as well as the local mercenary bands.' _The stranger responded ignoring Aria's second question.

'_Afraid to be attacked and stolen by some mercenaries are we?_' _Aria taunted to see if the stranger revealed more information.

'_By the contrary Aria. My superiors are only looking for a way to make as less damage as possible to your organization, after all if we are going to be partners we would be needing you to be at full strength.' _

'So I'm dealing with an organization here, but who are they then? Who

would be dumb enough to hack into this frequency just to ask for my permission?' She thought before responding.

'_Partners? You would need a lot to offer to be considered my partner. Can you afford that? I really don't think so.'_

"This can't be right" Garka said suddenly.

"What is it?" Aria asked.

"I have tracked the source of the signal. But according to this, whoever it is that is hacking us should be here with us in this balcony."

Aria took a double take with that statement, 'Either the tracking system was deflected somehow or our hacker is sneakier than I gave him/her credit for.' She was about to order Garka to recheck the information provided when a little distortion in the corner of the balcony caught her eye.

5 figures appeared in the room. The 5 individuals were clad in some kind of white and black armor with matching helmets, 4 of them having the appearance of a bird like predator while the fifth individual had an appearance of a Batarian. The bird like members wielded some kind of sword with them, a shield of some kind, and also some kind of gray pistol with orange lines while the Batarian like individual only had a pistol with himself. Also by the distortions around them it was clear that they used some kind of cloaking technology to arrive undetected.

Aria's henchmen immediately pointed their guns at the 5 intruders, they were about to open fire when Aria made a signal to hold fire a while longer. One of the intruders, the Batarian looking one, stepped in front of the other 4. He looked at all of Aria's henchmen aiming at him and then slowly took out his helmet.

Aria got a good look at the individual's face once his helmet was removed. He looked like the male version of an Asari, with just some minor differences. Aria's surprise was noticed only for a few fractions of a second, but it appeared to be enough time for the individual in front of her to notice, if his smirk was any indication. Aria sealed her emotions in the back of her mind and then proceeded to greet the intruder.

"So it appears that the rumors were right after all, a new powerhouse has entered the galactic stage. So my only question is, who are you and why should I not order my men here" Aria said while gesturing with her hand at all the guards present in the balcony, "to open fire on you? After all you hacked MY communications systems and entered Afterlife without MY permission." At that Aria raised an eyebrow, waiting for a response.

During all of Aria's speech the individual, now identified as a Human stayed calm, listening and observing to everything Aria said and did, then he responded, "For starters Ms. T'Loak, I'm Captain Foley of the ship _Early Arrival_, I'm representing the Systems Alliance in the Terminus Systems and like I said in the message that I sent to you, I'm here to establish a deal with you and your organization. A deal that will benefit both the Alliance and your organization."

"And what would be that deal?" Aria asked without showing interest.

"The Alliance needs to operate in the outer borders of the Terminus', but to do that we need supplies and the like. Those supplies will have to pass through this sector of the galaxy. If you could order all the ones under your jurisdiction to not interfere in our operations the Alliance is willing to give you some interesting information."

"And what would that 'interesting information' be?"

"Information that would normally be out of your reach as well as information on some leaks within your organization."

"And if I were to deny that proposition? After all I could always pay the Shadow Broker for that kind of information. If you want me to help you with that, you will have to offer even more than just some information."

Foley smirked at that remark, 'Well I knew that that wouldn't be enough, but then again that wasn't the full package.' He thought. "The Alliance is also willing to give you an updated defense system for Omega. Think about what you could do with a station protected by an energy shield, not just kinetic barriers, and also with a better programming for Omega's automated defenses. Practically no one would try to attack this station, and many would come here to Omega for protection because of the better defenses than the Citadel itself. Your economic power increases as well as your influence in a major part of the galaxy." Foley stopped there to let the words sink then he continued, "And everything that will cost you is to order everyone under your jurisdiction to not interfere with our operations on the outer borders as well as facilitate contact with the 3 main mercenary bands and the Alliance."

Aria thought about that proposition for a minute before signaling her henchman to lower their weapons. She made a gesture to the Captain to sit on her couch, as some kind of walls emerged from the roof, encasing the whole balcony in the club to prevent any kind of information leaks. Foley took the silent invitation and sat adjacent to Aria. During some minutes no one said anything, Aria was analyzing the offer in her mind, to her it looked like a good deal but something in the back of her mind told her that the Alliance's intentions were more than just operate in the outer borders of the Terminus'.

"What's the catch in here?" She finally asked.

"I believe that I don't follow you Ms. T'Loak." Foley responded, taken aback by the sudden question. He was sure that Aria would have taken the deal without many questions, 'It appears that her mind is sharper than I gave her credit for. I'll have to come with a decent lie in order to deceive our true intentions.' He thought.

"You come here, to Omega of all places, to offer better defensive systems to my organization just for me to order my men to not interfere in any way with the Alliance's operations on the Terminus. Do you really think that I'll fall for that? So I'll ask again, what's the catch in all this?" Aria said with a stern voice.

To his credit, Foley kept a neutral expression during all of Aria's analysis of the Alliance's deal, then he responded, "If you must know, the systems Alliance has tracked Loyalist Covenant activities close to the outer borders of the Terminus Systems. So unless you want an entire fleet of ships ranging from 2.5 Km to 13 Km long in your doorstep, ready to kill anything in its way, then I will suggest you to take the Alliance's proposition Aria." He lied with a professionalism that made you believe it was the entire truth.

"Do you think that I will believe you about such exaggerations of ships? There can't be ships that large that can actually move from system to system, much less operate effectively. If you have any kind of proof, that I really doubt, I will consider your offer."

"Well Aria, then I will show you that proof." Foley then proceeded to take a circular device from one of his pockets, he put it on the floor between both Aria and himself before activating it. A holographic image of a system appeared as Foley stood up to start his little presentation. "This system is located in the internal-outer borders of the Systems Alliance space. It is a system that makes frontier with Loyalist Covenant space, 3 weeks ago the system was attacked by a fleet of 30 ships. While we managed to repel the attackers, some of them managed to get away once they obtained whatever it was that they were looking for in the system. Here is a transmission 90 seconds before the attack." Foley stepped to the side to let the video play itself.

The video started to play from the point of view of a video-communications satellite that orbited the second planet closest to the sun in the system. Different transmission could be heard in the background but only one was played loud enough for anyone watching to listen. "Patrol group Echo here to command post, we are detecting Slip-Space ruptures close to the fifth planet, they match the signatures used by the Loyalist. To all the defense fleet, be ready for combat this is an Orange alert, over."

"Understood Echo patrol, get back to the colony, Over. Group Foxtrot get in low orbit and be ready to defend the planet from any kind of enemy intrusion."

"Copy that command center, Foxtrot group out."

The holographic video proceeded to zoom in around the fifth planet, there blue-purple colored holes opened in the middle of space, and from each of it different ships exited, all of them moving towards the colony ready to attack.

"Enemy presence is confirmed, to everyone in the sector fire at will, coordinate your attack for a more effective defense, command center out."

Hundreds of lights, representing the exchange of fire between ships, could be seen from the satellite's camera. The satellite then zoomed in one Loyalist Assault Carrier that had managed to destroy 2 Frigates in its way towards the colony.

Captain Foley stopped the video in the Carrier's image, then proceeded to show some of the tactical information of the ship to Aria.

"As you can see, the Loyalist forces can enter any system as they please without restrictions like the mass relays offer. Also this Assault Carrier is the biggest class of ship that the Loyalist has, measuring in about 13 km long, it is one of the hardest ships to destroy thanks to its strong shields and close-long range weaponry." Foley watched as Arias expression turned to one of worry, obviously debating if she could destroy such a ship without taking too many losses.

Foley decided to put some more pressure in order to make Aria take the deal. "Now, like I said before Aria, you could take the deal that I'm offering you or you could say no. If you decline our offer, then the Alliance will still proceed to make its operations on the Terminus', but if any of our ships and/or convoys is attacked in any way by someone under your jurisdiction, the Alliance will be forced to remove the threat in order to focus on the Loyalist Covenant. And when I say remove the treat off of the game board, I'm talking about doing it fast and in one move with a nuclear class bomb/missile."

"The Citadel Council would not tolerate that kind of attack, not even in the Terminus Systems. If the Alliance still do it, then you will be having an intergalactic war with the Council." Aria pointed out. She wanted to see if the treat was a genuine one or not.

"For the contrary, the Citadel stated clearly that they would not tolerate the detonation of a nuclear device INSIDE Citadel space unless it is under a really good reason and with a warning beforehand. The Terminus Systems is outside Citadel space and as such it is one of the four government parties that exist in the known galaxy. In the worst case scenario, the Alliance fights a war against the Terminus Systems, and the Council either stays neutral during the conflict or it helps the Alliance as an excuse to finally get rid of all the mercenary bands in the sector. It's your choice Aria." Foley finished with a victorious smirk.

Aria stayed calm and collected for a few seconds before bursting out laughing, surprising the Captain and everyone else inside the balcony. "It was already time for someone to come to Omega knowing how to play the game of politics with mercenaries and pirates. Captain Foley you got yourself a deal and a partner, but if for any reason the Alliance tries to stab me in the back, then I will retaliate with everything that I have." Aria said.

Foley just smiled and offered his hand to shake. Aria not knowing the foreign gesture opted to raise an eyebrow as she copied the gesture. Foley noticing the confusion on Aria's face, took her hand and shook it. "The technicians that will install the new defense systems in the station should arrive with the first convoy in about one standard week."

Aria nodded before pressing a button on her terminal to let the walls surrounding the balcony return to their original position. Foley put his helmet back on, taking this as his time to leave, this time by the front entrance of Afterlife. On his way, he and his bodyguards got a few looks from the small group of sober people in Afterlife.

Finally reaching the outside of the club he activated his communications system, {Lieutenant Swakt, send a message to High-Com,

tell them that Phase 2 of operation LIBRERIANWEB went peachy. Also inform them that a group of technicians would be needed on Omega to install the offered shields. They already know the specifics of the request.}

{Understood Shipmaster. Also, a stealth phantom it's on its way to the closest airlock from your position, Randal is already sending the coordinates of the extraction point.}

{Noted, Captain out.}

****October 9, 2172, 1000 Hours, Citadel Council Calendar, Widow System, Citadel Station, Presidium, Council Chambers.****

The Council Chambers of the Citadel, one of the most luxurious rooms in the entire station, was being occupied by the Council itself. The three councilors were currently discussing the latest operation of one of their agents while they waited for the Quarian Admirals to negotiate an end to their exile.

"The latest report from the STG group in the Alliance colony of Phoenix says that the extraction of the precious cargo was a total success." Valern informed.

"Remind me Valern, how was it exactly that we managed to extract the cargo unnoticed?" Sparatus asked with interest.

"With the utilization of a mini-jammer, this one works more like a cloaking device to any scan performed in a ship. It was designed to hide the signature of a small object aboard a transport. And it appears that it also works against the Systems Alliance's scans."

"Impressive, how did the R&D managed to come with something like this?" Tevos asked.

"With the study of some information founded in one of the Prothean beacons, we practically only had to assemble the pieces together and test it."

"And what about the two coordinates founded on the factory?" Sparatus asked.

"We managed to identify them as two different colony worlds inside Systems Alliance's space. It appears that the weapons assembled in the factory that we infiltrated go to another facility in either one of those two colonies to finish the manufacturing process of the product."

"Then that means that we practically have nothing besides the skeleton of the weapon." Sparatus pointed out.

"That's not entirely true. The internal components of the weapon are in there, the only thing that is missing is the power cell of the weapon. Analysts have confirmed that the weapon is either powered by some kind of plasma cell or with an ion cell to either fire plasma or a concentrated laser."

"Interesting, so this confirms our theory that the Alliance uses weaponry of two or three different classes for their ground troops."

Ballistic being one, while the other could be either laser, or plasma, it could even be both for all we know."

"Then we should start investing in shields designed to stop plasma or laser fire." Tevos said.

"STG is already on it. They will inform me once they have the first results." Valern said.

"Changing the subject, one of ourâ€¦" Whatever it was that Sparatus was going to say was interrupted by the beeping sound of a nearby terminal.

Tevos activated the terminal to receive the message, [Councilors, the Quarian Admirals are on their way to the Presidium.] Someone informed.

[Thanks for the update, we will await their arrival.] Tevos answered.

[Any time Councilor.] And with that the line was disconnected.

"We will continue this discussion after we deal with the Admirals." Tevos said. Sparatus and Valern only nodded, confirming their agreement.

It was not long before the doors to enter the chamber were opened. Through them entered Admiral Han'Gerrel vas Neema, and Admiral Daro'Xen vas Moreh, both of their body language expressing a serious aura around them. They approached the Councilors' pedestal and waited silently, not willing to start the conversation first.

After some seconds, Tevos finally decided to be the first one to speak. "Welcome to the Citadel Admirals, I hope that your steady has been well?"

"Save the pleasantries Councilor, why is it exactly that you called a reunion between us," Gerrel said while gesturing to himself and Xen, "and the Council? What rule did we broke this time?" He finished with some sarcasm in his last question.

Daro'Xen just shooked her head, showing her disapproval of the way Gerrel decided to start all this. "Forgive him Councilors, the last few months had been thought for the Migrant Fleet. Admiral Gerrel's patience has been on edge recently." Gerrel just glared at her for a bit at that last remark.

"Don't worry about it Admiral, we understand." Tevos said, dismissing the Admiral's little outburst.

"Well in that case we should get at the matter at hand." Sparatus said.

"Indeed. After thinking it over a few months, the Council has decided that is time to put an end to the exile imparted to the Quarians." Valern said.

"There will be some bonuses to this as well as some rules per say." Sparatus continued.

Both of the Admirals stayed quiet for a bit. Of all the reasons that they imagined why the Council requested their presence, this one was not one. Gerrel view this as hope for the Quarian people, as an opportunity to finally being able to reclaim the Home world from the Geth. Xen in the other hand, viewed this as an opportunity for all the Quarrians to start anew in the galaxy, and to not repeat their same mistakes.

Finally after some minutes of silence Xen spoke, "Councilors, this offer will have to be discussed with the rest of the Admiralty in the Fleet, but I believe that you mentioned a bonus and rules also. What exactly would those two be?"

"The Council will give the Quarrians two garden worlds for colonization as well as a shipyard to repair your current vessels and construct others to defend the colonies. During the mean time a combined defense fleet of the Asari Republic and the Turian Hierarchy will be defending both worlds." Tevos said.

"The rules will be as follow: For no reason is the Quarian people to attack any Geth ship, installation, or base that is inside the Perseus veil. Also the Pilgrimage will have to stop, but as we know that it has been part of your culture for hundreds of years, you can change the conditions of it, meaning that everything will be need to be done as the law indicates. Also in exchange for the protection that the Asari and Turian government will be providing to the two colonies, the Quarrians will need to send engineers to some R&D installations to work on some special projects. All the information, and knowledge obtained in such installations are classified, if there is any leak, the responsible will face a death sentence." Sparatus informed.

Gerrel, annoyed by the fact that the Quarrians won't be able to declare war on the Geth without breaking the agreement with the council decided to voice his opinion. "And if we were to decline this offer? After all we could always go to the Systems Alliance to ask for the help we need to reclaim Rannoch."

"If you decline our offer, then the Quarrians will still be under exile. Also I doubt that the Alliance will aid your cause to reclaim Rannoch. One reason is because they stated that the Systems Alliance will stay neutral to any conflict outside of Systems Alliance space, unless it affects them too. The second reason is their use of AIs. Yes, they know about the Geth and their origins, and while they have stated clearly that after some time their AIs go rampant, they still protect and treat them as any other citizen. So unless the Geth attacks the System Alliance and the Quarrians can tolerate and work alongside their AIs without any kind of problem, then they would not aid your cause." Tevos explained.

"The Systems Alliance uses AIs?! Why hadn't the Council done anything about that yet?" Gerrel asked surprised and alarmed while Xen listened with curiosity and interest.

"Because we have seen the Alliance's AIs by ourselves. They are different in most of the aspects that we know about AIs. For example, their AIs can actually express and feel emotions, as well as talk to anyone. And for what we understand about the Geth and the Alliance's AIs, their main difference is that the AIs used by the Alliance behave more like and individual and an organic being. Because of

those reasons and the fact that the Alliance provided evidence that they are not a threat to galactic stability, we have granted a probation period of 6 months before they can be in Citadel space as any other citizen of the galaxy." Valern said.

"What?! You can't surely being serious. Don't you see that that was just a façade to deceive their true intentions?!" Gerrel shouted.

"I assure you Admiral that the situation is under control." Tevos said.

Before Gerrel could shout again his dislike for AIs, Xen decided to interrupt him, "I believe that we are outside the main point of our visit to the Citadel Gerrel. Now about the offer, if we were to accept, how much time would it require to make it official?" She asked.

"Once the Quarians start settling in the colonies, we will make the official announcement." Tevos said.

"I see. Councilors, this is a choice that can't be made by ourselves here, if you could give us a few days to discuss this?"

"Don't worry we understand the impact that this choice could have in your people. Take the time that you need to decide." Tevos said with a smile.

Xen nodded and then turned to leave the chamber, accompanied by an enraged Admiral Gerrel. She will have to call all the Admiralty to discuss the future of the Quarian people, and also the interesting fact that the Alliance uses AIs, 'Who knows maybe we can learn something from their AIs.' She thought.

Back in the Council Chamber, the councilors relaxed after their stressful discussion with the Admirals. It had taken all of Sparatus' self-control to not explode at Koris' outburst about their supposed 'inability' to see a treat in front of their faces.

"Now that that is over with, Sparatus I believe that you had something to tell us?" Tevos said.

"Of course. I received a transmission from the Hierarchy, they have informed me that Magna base went silent, it is a research colony for the Hierarchy in the Ismar Frontier. We already sent a ship to find out what happened, but we lost contact with it an hour after it arrived at the system. The Hierarchy has requested me to send a team of SPECTRES to find out what is happening in there and secure the information in the base."

"Why can't the Hierarchy sent a battle group to the colony instead?" Tevos asked curiously.

"Because with the information provided by the Alliance about the Flood, the Hierarchy fleet is stretched in all the borders trying to locate the infected ship. The Hierarchy fears that if we sent a small fleet to the colony, the infected ship or even pirate or mercenary ships will use the opportunity to pass by our borders unnoticed."

"And what is inside the base that the Hierarchy wants to secure?" Valern asked.

"The samples recovered by SPECTRE agent Reena T'nol in the Big Ring. We are trying to come with a counter measure for the infection."

Alarmed by what that could mean if pirates or mercenaries managed to get their hands in such information, Valern and Tevos agreed to Sparatus' request.

"We would send agents Arterius, Krios, and T'nol, they have worked in the past and showed even better results than when they work alone." Tevos said.

"Thank you Tevos." Sparatus said gratefully.

After that the councilors retired to their personal rooms to rest. Sparatus in the meantime called the 3 SPECTRES to inform them about their next assignment.

****Age of Resurrection, Loyalist Covenant Calendar,**** Unknown
****System, Aboard CSO-Class Super Carrier Vengeance Coming.****

The Grand Prophet of Vengeance, the current political and religious leader of all Loyalist Covenant forces, analyzed the information displayed in his personal terminal. It showed the results of their latest victory against the Alliance, even if they didn't know that. The information corresponded to a new relic discovered by the Alliance, capable of sending a ship through vast distances of space in a matter of seconds. If he could get his hands on such a device then he would be able to study it and use it to his own advantage.

[Communications, send this message to the Fleets of Supreme Glory, Gods Will and Infinite Destruction, they are to go to the provided coordinates and secure the Alliance colony in the system. Kill everyone that stands in your way.]

[Affirmative your greatness.] The operator in the other end responded.

'Soon, soon that relic would be within my grasps.' Vengeance thought while observing the holographic image of the Alliance colony called Phoenix.

****A/N: Well here's another chapter. Sorry for the small size of it, I promise that the next one will be a longer one. This chapter is more to tie some loose ends and give a preview of the possible future, so an arc of sorts if you will. Now Please Review this chapter I want to know your inputs in the plot. Until next time.****

8. Mysteries

****The Next Great Journey****

****A/N: And I'm back with a new chapter. Sorry for the long wait but this past two weeks were full of tests, projects, and presentations for school. Thanks again to everyone who clicked favorite or follow**

and also to the ones that took the time to post a review. I want to thank Lord Izanagi for Beta read the chapter for all my grammatical errors, Thank you very much.**

IMPORTANT NOTICE: I changed the format of the Codex of the story, I think that it will be easier to read and understand it in this new version. So if you want to check it out go ahead. :P It has been updated to current events in the story.

IMPORTANT NOTICE #2: I'm not sure if I should change the rating of this fiction to M. Can someone please tell me what do you think about that? I would appreciate that.

Now onto the chapter.

"Speaking"

'Thoughts'

[Radio Communications, Ground forces-Ground forces, and Ship-Ship]

{Ground to Ship Communications}

Flash back of previous chapter(s)

Flash Back

_ 'Messages on Screen' _

Sound Effects

Line Break just shows a change of scenery.

Disclaimer: I don't own Halo or Mass Effect, both belong to their respective owners.

Chapter 8: Mysteries

October 12, 2172, 2000 Hours, Citadel Council Calendar, Ismar Frontier, En Route to Magna Colony, STG Stealth Vessel **_Open Mind**_**.**

Through the void of space, between the planets of the system, a solitary ship made its way towards the second planet closest to the sun. This ship, while not heavily armed, had the best of stealth technology in all the known galaxy.

Inside the ship, a Turian watched through one of the windows what was left of the defense fleet of the colony. But what angered him was the fact that the ones responsible for this had only a few ships destroyed in the debris. He turned to look at his room on the ship, remembering what Councilor Sparatus had ordered him and his team to do in the colony.

He had entered the Council Chambers, followed by Thane and Reena. The three SPECTRES made their way through the chamber, heading for the podium where Sparatus awaited.

_"Councilor," Saren greeted once he and his teammates arrived at the

podium._

"Agents Arterius, Krios, and T'nol," Sparatus greeted back, "What I'm about to tell you is classified information, if someone else finds about this, you three will be held responsible, and as such the death penalty will be your sentence. Understood?"

"Affirmative," The three SPECTRES answered.

Sparatus nodded and then activated a hologram showing a colony. "A few days ago, Magna colony was attacked by Geth forces. We don't know for sure what their objective was. Some hours after the attack, we lost contact with the colony. The Hierarchy sent a battle group to recover the colony, but one hour after entering the system we lost contact with the battle group as well. That's why I'm sending you three and a STG ship to the colony. Find out what happened, why the Geth attacked, reestablish the satellite communications if possible in order to send a fleet, and extract all the information in Magna base; if you can't extract it then destroy the base."

"Councilor, if I may, what kind of information is kept on the base?" Saren asked.

"Information that can't fall in the incorrect hands, agent. Magna base is where the samples recovered in the Big Ring were sent."

That ringed a bell to the three SPECTRES, all of them recounting their encounter with the Flood. "We will depart immediately, Councilor," Saren said as he and his team turned to leave the chamber and go to the hangar.

"Agent Arterius, we have arrived at the colony," The VI of the ship informed him, taking him out of the memory.

Saren stood up and started to move towards the bridge. On his way to the bridge, he saw Thane already making his way. Some minutes later, Reena joined the two agents. Entering the bridge, the three SPECTRES noticed the crew already monitoring everything on the system. They ignored them, opting to move to the commanding officer's position where he was analyzing the tactical screen.

"Anything on the system Captain?" Saren asked.

The Salarian looked at him, as if analyzing his response for a few seconds. "Affirmative. We have detected the Geth ships in the other side of the moon. And, there's also an energy source of some kind near Magna base. I recommend investigating it before moving with the objective."

"Some kind of signal from survivors, perhaps?" Thane asked.

"Doubtful. Signal too irregular in frequency. It doesn't match any kind of distress call or beacon. Probably a Geth base of sorts or a malfunctioning generator. More information needed."

"Why would the Geth install a base in the middle of a town? Why not take Magna base instead?" Reena asked.

"Because Magna base is under lockdown, it will take the Geth time to breach the security measures of the upper levels. They are establishing a perimeter of sorts, if my assumptions are correct," Saren informed. "Any recommendations for ground deployment?" he asked to the Captain.

"Take the kodiak to the surface. Land a few kilometers away from the town. We will stay in the dark providing tactical information of the area."

Saren nodded before turning and leaving towards the armory, Thane and Reena not far behind. Once they arrived at the armory, the three SPECTRES proceeded to get their weapons. Saren took his Phaeston rifle with a modified scope for close to mid-range, and he also took a Predator pistol. Thane took a modified Widow Sniper rifle, it had a thermal scope as well as a thermal clip that allowed it to shoot three times instead of one. He also took a pair of Paladin pistols. Reena took a Scimitar shotgun and a pair of Carnifex pistols.

Once they were set up, the 3 SPECTRES moved towards the hangar. Arriving at the hangar, the three entered the Kodiak shuttle, which was already ready to part towards the surface.

"Alright people, once we land, we move towards the Geth base. We need to download whatever intel that they have there. After that, we blow their base and then we proceed towards Magna base. Just remember the priority here is the intel, finding survivors is a secondary objective," Saren finished as the shuttle landed.

Once the door of the shuttle opened, the three SPECTRES immediately got out. Checking their surroundings for any kind of ambush, they waited until the shuttle departed towards the ship in orbit.

{Bird Eye we have landed, do you copy?} Saren asked to their overwatch in the ship.

{Affirmative SPECTRE team. Sensors have located the dark zone 1.5 Km north of your position. There's no Geth activity between you and the dark zone. Recommend to proceed with caution, though. Bird Eye, out.} The Salarian, code name Bird Eye who was managing the sensors of the ship, responded.

{Understood. Warn us if anything changes. SPECTRE team out.}

"Okay, Thane take point, keep an eye out for any kind of activity. Reena, you and I will cover Thane. From now on, use only radio communications."

[Understood.]

[Got it,] Thane and Reena responded.

Thane started to move ahead, looking through the Widow's scope once in a while. They entered a forest area, the fog of the night not helping them in the slightest to locate any kind of threat. Thane kept moving ahead, trusting all of his senses and instincts to locate any kind of threat. Suddenly, he heard something in the distance, and made a fist sign, making the other two SPECTRES stop. Thane lined the scope of his rifle, looking for any sign of activity.

[What is it?] Saren asked.

[Someone or something is observing us. I need to be at a higher altitude to locate it.] Thane said. [Keep your eyes open, I'll go to the top of this tree.]

Thane then proceeded to climb up the tree that was next to him while Saren and Reena took cover behind some rocks, each one of them looking at their surroundings.

Thane lined up the thermal scope of his Widow rifle. He immediately started to see everything in colors, ranging from red, to orange, yellow, and blue. In the distance, he spotted an orange-yellow form moving outside the forest.

[I located the individual.] He informed. [It appears to be a survivor, but something is wrong. It should appear in the red-orange spectrum, but it is in a low orange-yellow spectrum.]

[Maybe he or she is covered in mud, you know, to hide more easily from the Geth in the area?] Reena suggested.

[It's possible. After all, every Turian has to learn the basics of survival in a war zone.] Saren said. [Thane, how does everything looks like from up there?]

[Clear, there's no sign of activity any more. I recommend to proceed with caution though, according to telemetry, we are near the dark zone.]

[Noted.]

Thane jumped from the tree, landing next to the other two SPECTRES. He then proceeded to guide them through the rest of the forest. Once they reached the edge of the forest, they could see the edges of the town a few meters ahead.

Entering the town, they were able to see the devastation in which it was. Houses and buildings were in ruins, fires adorned most of the vehicles in the streets as well as some buildings, and signs of battle could be seen on the streets as well as blood spattered on the walls and floor of alleys, streets, and everything that was close by. A few bodies were scattered in the streets, some were easily identified as either civilians, military, or police force, while other were so scorched that it would require dental identifications to place a name on them; others, while still identifiable, were piled up in a small mountain, all of them dismembered and with an expression of pure terror on their faces.

Once Saren saw the massacre that happened here, his emotions threatened to overpower his more rational side; he wanted to go and kill every single Geth in this colony, to show no mercy against them and also inflict the same pain to them that they caused to all these innocent souls. 'How many families were destroyed? How many kids were stripped of their life? How many mothers and fathers will mourn the loss of their child? How many sons and daughters will suffer the loss of a parent or parents? And all because the Geth wanted to acquire some information in a base that is 5 Km from this town!' Saren thought to himself.

Saren didn't even notice that he was vibrating because of the pure anger and hatred that he was feeling right now.

"Saren! Saren!" Reena called, taking him out of his stupor.

Once she noticed that Saren was listening to her, she put a hand on his shoulder, showing her support and that he wasn't going to pass through this kind of pain alone.

"They were brave souls, Saren, they defended this town and colony with all that they had. And even if it wasn't enough, they died with the thought that they managed to get more time for the innocents that managed to escape this horror. Their sacrifice will not be in vain, we will find out the reason for this atrocity and stop anyone or anything that was behind this," Reena said to him with conviction and a tone of understanding.

"Thanks Reena, I needed that," Saren responded with a small smile, showing his appreciation for her words.

[Saren, Reena, you need to come and see this.] Thane said before any of them could say anything else.

Saren sighed, pushing all of his emotions down in order to continue the mission. [We are on our way, Thane.]

Saren glanced at Reena before making a motion with his head to follow. He glanced back once more to the bloodbath in the street behind. "That the spirits bless your souls and that you can find peace in the afterlife," he muttered before moving towards Thane's position.

They arrived at a destroyed house that was in the adjacent street from the one that they came from. You could see the remains of the furniture that used to adorn the house. Some pictures that were once on the walls laid down on the floor burned or ripped apart, but what caught Saren's and Reena's attention were the marks on the wall, as well as some remains in the floor. On the walls there were marks made by claws, as well as some blood along with them, while on the floor there were remains of metallic parts, but they also were encrusted with some kind of organic material.

[What happened here?] Saren asked, totally surprised.

[A fight of some kind, but it appears that the aggressor took the victim with him/her/it. The marks on the walls suggest some kind of reptile or avian animal, but the remains on the floor suggest that the aggressor has some kind of cybernetics. That would explain what happened here, but who or what was behind this, and why they took the victim with them, is still unknown.] Thane explained.

[Are we sure that the Geth were responsible for this? I mean, we haven't seen any kind of body or signal that suggest that the Geth were responsible.] Reena inquired.

[At this point, I'm not sure if the Geth attacked the colony in the first place, maybe someone else was trying to incriminate them, or the Geth have found allies capable of this kind of destruction.] Saren said, [But either way, the question of why they took some bodies of the colonist remains.]

[Maybe Bird Eye can gives us some clues in the matter?] Thane suggested.

Saren nodded and then contacted the ship in orbit, {Bird Eye, do you copy? SPECTRE team here, over.}

{Affirmative SPECTRE team, we copy you. What do you need?}

{I'm sending you some data of a few samples for analysis. Also, have you detected any Geth presence or any kind of presence on the planet?}

{I got the data. And yes, I have detected Geth presence close to Magna base. There also appears to be some Geth units around the perimeter of the dark zone.}

{Noted. How far away is the dark zone from our position?}

{It is 500 m north. Be careful. Bird Eye out.}

[Well it looks like we will have to move in order to get the answers to this mystery.] Thane said.

The three SPECTRES exited the destroyed house, moving through the sides of the street in order to minimize the possibilities of detection. Arriving at a plaza, they immediately took cover inside some buildings. Outside in the open they saw the entrance to what they believed was the Geth base; in the perimeter there was a colossus, and Geth troops. In the far side to the left of the base were some spikes measuring around 3-3.5 meters in height, and encrusted in them were the bodies of a few Turians. Some of them still looked like their old selves but others were covered in cybernetics of all kinds and forms, ranging from eyes to complete parts of their extremities.

The three SPECTRES watched with horror as one Turian that was still alive was being dragged by a pair of Geth units towards the spikes just to plug him in in one of the spikes. The Turian let out a loud scream as the spike passed through his thorax, then he went limp as some cables were injected in various parts of his body. Nearby, a pair of spikes retracted themselves, the Turians that were on them fell and then stood up, their eyes a vibrant blue-yellow color devoid of life. The Geth nearby gave them a pair of rifles, and then were sent to a convoy taking them towards Magna base.

During all of this, Saren had a hard time controlling his emotions in order to evict going out there in a suicide run. Reena, on the other hand, was so shocked at what she saw, that all coherent thoughts in her mind were non-existent. She was frozen in her place, unable to do anything until she sorted out what she was seeing. Thane for his part was the most calmed one of the three; the training that he received since he was six managed to keep his mind clear enough to think coherently in this situation.

Seeing the state in which his companions were, he proceeded to signal Saren to follow him, he then smacked Reena in order to take her out of her shocked state. Once both of his companions were coherent enough, they followed him to the second floor of the building that they were in, taking cover in one of the rooms that had 2 windows

overlooking the plaza.

[It looks like now we know why they took the bodies of the colonists, this also means that we are inside the dark zone, so contact with the ship to order an orbital strike would not be an option.] Thane said.

[Those bastards will pay for what they did here. We need to destroy that place now, before more victims around the rest of the colony suffer the same fate.] Saren said.

[But how do we destroy this place? We don't have enough charges to blow up the base.] Reena said.

Saren thought for a moment about that before he got an idea, [Thane, let me borrow your Widow rifle for a bit.]

Thane nodded and handed his Widow to Saren. Once Saren took the rifle, he moved towards one of the windows overlooking the Geth base. He deactivated the thermal function in the scope before looking through it. He lined the scope on the spikes and then followed one of the cables connected to them, noticing that they entered the base. 'Just as I thought. Those cables go to a power supply inside the base.' He thought.

[I think I know how to blow up that base.] Saren said. At the curious looks that he got from his companions, he elaborated. [The cables connected to the spikes go inside the base, if we follow them, there is a high possibility that it will lead us to the power supply of the base. We can put the charges there and then once we are out, detonate them. Reena, you and I will go inside the base while Thane keeps over watch in case reinforcements arrive.]

[That could work, but what about communications? We don't know if our coms will work once you two are inside the base.] Thane pointed out.

[We will have to take the risk. We can't leave this base standing, and we can't order an orbital strike because of the jammer used in this entire zone.]

Thane looked down for a few seconds, trying to come with a different idea, but he knew that they didn't have many options in this situation.

[Okay, I'll situate myself in this room. I'll clear a path for you two, but once one Geth is down, the rest will know that we are here.]

Saren nodded at that before signaling Reena to follow him. The both of them exited the building from the backside, which was in the middle of an alley. They moved towards the corner of the building in order to take cover.

[Thane, how does it look from up there?] Saren asked.

[Security is pretty tight, it will be hard to get you inside without alerting anyone. If we time this right, we will be able to evict detection.] Thane responded.

[Understood. Guide us, will you?]

[Move ahead towards the gray car on the left side. Take cover and then wait for my signal.]

Both Saren and Reena moved as fast as they could without making a lot of sound towards the car. Once they reached the car, both Saren and Reena heard a gunshot, a sniper gunshot.

[Thane, what's happening?] Saren asked.

[Geth units have entered the building. They know that we are here. I'll have to relocate my position. Until then, you two are on your own. Good luck.] Thane responded between gunshots.

Just as Thane cut the transmission, enemy fire started to hit their cover position. Saren immediately lined up his Phaeston rifle through one of the windows of the car, he then proceeded to shoot in an automatic set up towards the enemy. He managed to kill three Geth units before having to take cover to reload. In the meantime, Reena used her Carnifex pistols to cover Saren.

After a few seconds, Saren popped back up, firing at the incoming Geth and mechanical Turians. Reena sent a singularity inside the enemy lines, managing to trap five units in the gravity vortex. She then detonated the singularity with warp. The incoming detonation just added more explosive power to the frag grenade that Saren threw, killing the five floating Geth, plus two of the mechanical Turians.

The Geth and mechanical Turians responded in retaliation, throwing some grenades and keeping Saren and Reena pinned down with their firing rate. The colossus then started to open fire at them with its automatic machine gun, making the two SPECTRES take cover while the rest of the ground troops zeroed-in on their position.

[We have to move out of here, if we don't do it now then we will last minutes against them.] Saren screamed through all the noise.

[But to where? We can't get out of here unless we want to become target dummies. And besides, a barrier won't last long against this quantity of fire power.] Reena responded while shooting her pistols at a pair of Geth that came close enough to the destroyed car.

Saren sighed, knowing that Reena was right. He aimed his rifle and shot at a mechanical Turian approaching, killing it in a matter of seconds before taking cover again. He and Reena were about to pop out of cover to shoot again, when in the distance they saw the colossus from before charging its cannon, ready to blow up the car that they were using as cover.

The sound of the charge could be heard, then the colossus let loose the plasma projectile. It went straight for Saren's and Reena's cover, ready to incinerate them, but in the last moment Reena erected a barrier, managing to protect them and the car. The plasma projectile impacted Reena's barrier, managing to shake her a little. Saren let relief wash through him at seeing the barrier, the only drawback was that he couldn't shoot outside the barrier while the enemy eventually would bring the barrier down and then the colossus will finish them.

Thane was currently fighting his way through one alley in order to get to his secondary sniper position, which was a clock tower that overlooked the entire plaza. He had opted to use his Paladin pistols in such close quarters, he overlooked from the top of the wall that he was using as cover. 'Three hostiles, all of them separated from each other. Moving head on would be suicide, but using the stairs that are adjacent to me will provide me with the required advantage in here.' He thought before taking cover again.

Having decided for his next course of action, Thane threw a grenade before activating his tactical camouflage. The grenade did its work, making the three Geth take cover and miss the outline of Thane's camouflage while he climbed the stairs. The Geth kept shooting at the wall once they were again in the open. Thane for his part had managed to reach the upper level of the stairs. He took out his Widow rifle and took aim. He shot the Geth that was behind his companions. The Geth immediately fell to the floor, dead before it hit. Thane moved the crosshair to his next target in a matter of seconds. He shot it, and like the first one, it fell. The last Geth took notice and immediately took cover. Thane lined the crosshair and waited patiently. After some seconds, the Geth popped its head up and Thane shot, the Geth's head blew to pieces before the body fell to the ground.

Thane finished climbing all the way to the building that he was on. Looking to the side, he immediately spotted the clock tower, which was two roofs from his position. He started running towards it, jumping once in a while to either get to the next roof or to evade some obstacles in the way. Once he got to the edge of the building in front of the clock tower, he looked down and around, in search for a way to get in. Finally, he spotted a balcony one floor below him; he jumped towards it and then proceeded to enter the tower.

[Thane!] Thane heard through his radio, [We need backup now, a colossus has Reena and I pinned down. If we don't take it down soon, then we are goners!] Saren said between explosions and gunfire.

[I'm almost at my second sniper position.] Thane said while running through the stairs. [Just hold on for a few more seconds.]

[Understood, just hurry up. I'm not sure how much more punishment Reena can take.]

Thane didn't respond, opting instead to finish climbing the last few steps. Once he got to the top of the clock tower he positioned himself in the railing in front of the clock. He took out his Widow rifle and immediately set it up, putting the two support legs on the railing, which attached themselves magnetically to the metal of the railing.

Thane activated the thermal function in the scope in order to see better at this time of night. He immediately spotted Saren, who was getting out of the barrier once in a while in order to shoot the incoming enemies, and Reena, who looked like she was going to pass any moment now while still holding the barrier up.

He moved the scope towards one of the mechanical Turians who was approaching the duo through the left side, he set the crosshairs 2

mills up and 1.5 mills in front of the target in order to compensate for his movement and the wind. He breathed once, twice, and then fired. The mechanical Turian fell to the ground dead, a smoking hole in the side of its head being the only evidence of being shot. Thane moved the crosshairs to two more Geth that were approaching through the right side, both of them falling dead to the ground in a matter of seconds.

Thane reloaded his rifle and then zoomed-in in the colossus, he searched for a power cell or an energy source in it. He finally found it, mounted in the front of its head. 'I'll have to get his attention in order to get a clear shot.' He thought just as the barrier erected by Reena finally succumbed to the colossus' fire power.

Thane targeted the colossus immediately, shooting it twice in the head. That managed to get its attention as it turned to the direction from where the shots came from. It started to load its main cannon just as Thane targeted the power source. Thane shot at it just as the colossus finished its charge. The projectile hit the power cell, making it explode with the colossus' head. The colossus fell to the ground dead, just to serve as cover for the remaining six Geth units.

After hearing the explosion that killed the colossus, Saren immediately popped out of cover to finish off the remaining Geth. After some seconds the six remaining Geth were on the ground destroyed thanks to Saren's and Thane's coordination of firing rate.

[All targets eliminated. What's the status of both of you?] Thane asked.

[I'm good, but Reena is knocked out. Her vitals show signs of extreme fatigue, she'll have to rest for a bit in order to recuperate.] Saren responded with a hint of worry in his voice.

[Understood, take her to the house that we were in. I have a good sight of it from up here, I'll be watching her while you take out the base.]

[Okay.] Saren said as he carried Reena back towards the house. Entering the house he noticed a few Geth bodies on the door, 'Probably the ones that located Thane.' He thought.

Arriving at the room where they were before, he laid Reena on the bed before going outside. Once again in the plaza he looked through the dead bodies of the Geth and the mechanical Turians. After some minutes of searching the bodies, he had acquired a total of six thermal clips and a pair of grenades.

[You know, Thane, we should give these abominations a name in order to identify them in future engagements.] Saren said.

[I agree, that'll make the flow of tactical data easier. How does Marauder sound?] Thane responded.

[Marauder? Why that particular name?]

[I noticed that they are sneakier, and like to flank their opponents. It's just a fitting name.]

Saren smiled a little at his friend's reasoning, 'Thane still is the most observant of us three.' He thought. [Okay, Marauder it is.]

Saren proceeded to move towards the base, checking that there weren't any guards in the front entrance, [Okay, I'm going in. If I don't come out in an hour, leave me and move towards Magna base and secure the data.]

[Understood, and good luck.]

Saren entered the base noticing that there were no lights of any kind in the corridors. He activated the night vision function in his eye-holographic tactical HUD, and immediately noticed that he was in a long corridor. Saren looked around the corridor until he spotted the cables that he was supposed to follow. He moved in the direction that the cables were heading to. After taking some turns, he finally arrived at a locked door. Saren activated his Omni-tool and started to hack into the mechanisms of the door, and after some frustrating minutes, he finally managed to crack the lock open.

The door opened to reveal a large room with many holo-screens and another door in the far side. The moment that Saren entered the room, all the holo-screens turned on, showing the image of a being that gave Saren the creeps.

The being was pitch black, it had the shape of an elongated squid of some kind, with five visible tentacles and a brilliant red eye. Saren stood still, looking at the being in the holo-screen with a trace of fear.

{Saren Arterius. Turian. Youngest SPECTRE in the Citadel ranks. Established on the Big Ring until recently. One of the few survivors of the Flood outbreak in the Big Ring.}

{What? How do you know that? Who or what are you?!} Saren asked, surprised, while activating the recording function in his Omni-tool through a neural command.

{I know many things. My existence and what I am is beyond your comprehension. Your presence in this world is futile, as are your actions on it. You, like the rest of the species living in this galaxy, will perish against the cycle of extinction, just as the ones before you did.}

After hearing that response, combined with the feeling in his gut and the presence that the being possessed, Saren managed to get to one conclusion. 'So it is a Reaper. The legends were true after all, and if the legends are true then this is bad news.' Saren thought, alarmed.

{You are a Reaper!} Saren said, surprised. {You won't be able to accomplish your goal, not while I'm still breathing.} Saren said with finality.

{Your resistance to see the truth is of no importance to me. The cycle will continue and no one will be able to stop it. And you won't be able to see the end like the rest of the galaxy will.} And with that the Reaper cut the transmission. The image faded to be replaced

with a five minute countdown.

'Shit! It was a distraction' Saren thought before running towards the exit. He ran through the corridors until he got to the main corridor that he came through. He rushed even more towards the exit, but just as he was about to reach it he heard an explosion coming from the inside. Reaching the outside, the entire base exploded, sending Saren through the air. He readied himself for the impact, closing his eyes in the process but just as he was about to reach the ground he was pulled up once again. Opening his eyes, he noticed that he was floating around a singularity.

[I see that you forgot to detonate the charges after getting to a safe zone.] Someone said through the radio.

Saren looked up and saw Reena there, standing with a smile on her face, [Reena? What? I thought that you were knocked out!] Saren responded surprised.

Reena chuckled a little at that before undoing the singularity, dropping Saren in the process.

[So, why the suicidal run?] Reena asked more seriously.

Before Saren could respond, the SPECTRES received an incoming transmission from the STG ship.

{SPECTRE team do you copy? Bird Eye here, over.}

{Affirmative Bird Eye, we copy you.}

{Good, good. I'm assuming that the Geth base was dealt with?}

{Affirmative, we are moving towards Magna base now.}

{Noted. Before you start moving, a Geth vehicle is on its way towards your position. ETA three minutes. Over.}

[I'll explain after we deal with this.] Saren said to Reena. She just nodded at that before taking her shotgun out.

[Thane, do you have eyes on the Geth vehicle?]

[Affirmative, do you want me to disable it?]

[Negative, we are using it as our ride to Magna base.]

[Understood.]

Saren and Reena moved towards the destroyed colossus' body to use it as cover. After waiting for a few minutes, a vehicle with the shape of an insect of sorts arrived at the plaza. From it three Geth got out while one stayed on the turret of the vehicle, looking for any kind of threat.

[Fire on my signal.] Saren ordered while he aimed his Phaeston rifle towards the incoming Geth.

Aiming at the Geth in the far left side, Saren waited patiently for a bit before shooting at it in full automatic mode. Just as he shot, Reena fired at the Geth in the middle with her pair of pistols. Both Geths fell dead before they could respond properly. A gunshot in the distance was heard followed by another, both, the Geth in the turret and the one in the ground fell dead like their comrades.

[That was easy.] Reena commented.

[There's no sign of more enemy presence in the area.] Thane informed.

[Understood. Thane we are going to your position to pick you up.] Saren informed.

[Understood.]

Reena and Saren proceeded to board the Geth vehicle, Reena taking the driver sit while Saren used the turret. They speeded through the streets of the town, watching as the sunrise took place in the horizon. Within minutes they arrived at the entrance of the clock tower where Thane was already waiting for them. He got inside the vehicle before it speeded away towards Magna base.

[So Saren, why did you detonated the charges before getting out of the base?] Reena asked.

Saren sighted before explaining what happened once he entered the control room inside the Geth base.

[So a Reaper is what you say it was the being?] Thane asked.

[If my assumptions are right, then yes. It could also be a trap by the Geth to distract us, but I have a feeling that that is not the case.] Saren responded.

[What are we going to tell the council? We can't just go saying that the Reapers are real with only a recording of a transmission as our only proof.] Reena pointed out.

[We won't tell them anything about this encounter, I'll be looking in to this information once we are back in the Citadel. Unless we find more evidence to my Reaper theory in Magna base, of course.]

[Do you think it wise to follow that course of action?] Thane asked.

[It is our only option right now. The council is already stressed enough trying to locate the Flood ship as well as trying to improve relationships with the Alliance. If we tell them that the Reapers are real and that they are coming without enough evidence then they will dismiss the claim and move on as if nothing was said about the subject.]

After that, no one said anything else, opting instead to watch their surroundings. The vehicle exited the town following a road that lead to the base. To either side of the road, vegetation adorned their views; once in a while you could see the local fauna running around, looking for some kind of refuge. In the sky the avian animals were moving in the opposite direction of the base, flying away from the

danger in it.

Everything else around the road seemed calm and at peace, letting Saren relax a bit and think of the events of the day. 'So the Geth turned the colonists into Marauders. But why? Do they plan to make a big strike against the Citadel, Palaven, Thessia, Sur'Kesh, or Systems Alliance territory? And if so, with what purpose? The Systems Alliance seems like the most probable target, if they succeed in attacking and winning against the Alliance, then they will get an incredible boost in technology. But if my theory of the Reapers is correct, then they could be after another thing. Maybe the Citadel itself, a super weapon of sorts, or a way to bring the Reaper armada faster!

Convincing the councilors about this threat would be almost impossible without the necessary evidence, and even then it would be difficult to convince them into taking action. I could try to convince the Primarch, telling him that if the council notice the sudden militarization we could justify it as a 'just in case the Alliance decides to attack us' event. But we will have to make sure that the Alliance knows that we aren't preparing to attack them. But how? I got it! I could pass the necessary information to their representatives in the embassy, they would see it as an act of trust that will facilitate relationships with the Hierarchy. I will have to talk to the Primarch first, though.'

[Saren, we are close to Magna base.] Thane reported.

[Understood. Reena, stop the vehicle, we are going on foot from here.]

Reena stopped the vehicle in the side of the road, the three SPECTRES then climbed out of it and moved inside the forest to take cover. Saren signaled Thane and Reena to follow him. The three SPECTRES moved through the forest with only the light that the early morning sun provided. They arrived at a small hill that just overlooked the fence around the entrance of the base, Thane took out his Widow Rifle and proceeded to overlook the camp that the Geth had established.

[There's two snipers in the roof of the base, as well as various turrets aiming at the entrance. There's a pair of colossus and multiple Geth and Marauders forces in the front gate. I recommend to find an alternate insertion point.] Thane informed.

[That's the problem, according to the schematics, that's the only entrance to the base. The rest of the base is surrounded by a fence, if we try to climb it the moment that we reach the top the snipers will spot us and then its game over.] Saren said.

[So we have to engage them in a head on fight, then.] Reena said while reading her shotgun for more emphasis.

[It appears so, but this time we can order an orbital strike. Then we just go there and finish off any survivors.] Saren pointed out, [Thane give me the coordinates of the colossus.]

[Affirmative.]

{Bird Eye, do you copy? SPECTRE team here, over.}

{We copy you SPECTRE team, what's your status?}

{We need an orbital strike in the following coordinates.} Saren said as he uploaded the coordinates that Thane gave him, {Concentrate the bombardment in that area as much as you can, over.}

{Understood, but once we fire will go radio silent for at least two hours to hide our presence from Geth ships, over.}

{Noted.}

{Coordinates acquired, firing on target in thirty seconds. SPECTRE team stand aside, over.}

The three agents watched the sky from the hill just as a barrage of missiles came down on the base. The impact of multiple disruptor missiles was devastating for the Geth forces in the base. The front gate was destroyed, part of the roof of the base fell and multiple explosions adorned the yard in front of the base. Thane looked through the scope of his rifle once the smoke started to dissipate.

[The colossi are down, as well as most of the forces in the front yard.]

[Understood, Thane take out the remaining forces. Reena, you and me will go inside the base. Thane, if something happens, let us know.]

Thane nodded before looking through his scope again, a gunshot following the action in a matter of seconds. Saren and Reena climbed down the hill and started running towards the base, weapons at the ready. Getting close to where the gate used to be, they could hear the fire burning through the building and the bodies of the Geth. One surviving Geth took notice of both of them, but before it could aim its rifle, Thane shot it down.

Arriving at the entrance door, both SPECTRES took cover in the sides. Thane opened the door and Reena sprang inside, shotgun at the ready and looking for any threats. She signaled Saren that everything was clear before moving forward. They entered to a reception like area, there was a front desk and some couches as well as some still functioning screens that were showing static. There were two corridors, one to the left and one to the right, Saren moved towards the left corridor with Reena following him.

Sign of battle could be seen in it, if the blood in the walls was any indication. Bodies of both Turians and Geth adorned the rooms on the sides, the remains of a turret with its controller laid on the floor in front of the elevator's door. Saren clicked the control of the elevator but it was of no use as nothing happened, not even the sound of an elevator coming could be heard.

[The power supply must be off.] Saren said.

[We don't have time to go and turn it on, not with the Geth getting close to the data.] Reena said as she was surrounded by blue energy.

She opened the doors of the elevator before stepping back again.

Saren just looked at her with a bit of surprise at her actions before shaking it off and moving to the emergency stairs inside the elevator's compartment. Both climbed down until reaching sub-level three; Saren took out one of the charges and put it on the door that separated them from the corridor in the level. The two agents climbed up a floor before detonating the charge.

Climbing back down towards the door Saren took a pic inside the corridor only to hid his head back in the elevator's compartment as fire passed by the door. Saren swore as he took out a grenade, activating the countdown sequence, he threw it inside the corridor. Once the grenade exploded he stepped inside the corridor, immediately taking cover in a room nearby.

[Reena come inside now, I'll cover you.] Saren said as he popped out of cover and fired at the Marauders in the corridor, forcing them to take cover as Reena got inside.

Once inside Reena created a singularity in the corridor, making the three Marauders float helplessly as both SPECTRES shot at them.

[Where's the lab?] Reena asked.

[Just around the command center.] Saren responded as he checked the map in his Omni-tool.

They started to move ahead after that, checking every room for more enemy presence. After a few skirmishes they finally arrived at the command center, which strange enough was empty. Chairs and data-pads were spread through the floor, screens were turning on and off while others were still functional or had static.

[Thane, we are at the command center, how does everything looks out there?]

[Clear, there's no sign of enemy activity aroundâ€¦] by the gods!]

[Thane? Thane! What's happening out there?!]

[There's an enormous ship leaving the planet.]

[A what?]

[Saren! Over here.] Reena called.

Saren moved towards Reena's position, when he approached he stopped in shock. There on one of the screens that still showed the video taken by the security cameras, a pitch black ship, with an enlarged form and tentacles, was moving towards atmosphere; multiple Geth ships were following behind it.

[By the spirits! That's the being that I saw in the Geth base!] Saren said, totally surprised at the fact that the being was actually a ship.

[Well, on the bright side, we have now enough proof to convince the council about this threat.] Reena pointed out trying to lighten up the situation.

Saren blinked a few times before connecting his Omni-tool to the server and copying the video. Once he finished, he proceeded to connect the satellites in orbit and send a signal to the Hierarchy. Reena, meanwhile looked for a way to unlock the doors to the lab. After some minutes, both of them finished their respective tasks and moved towards the lab.

Arriving at the lab, they noticed that the inside was a mess, Saren connected his Omni-tool to the server just to find out that the data was copied a few hours ago, though not all the information was copied.

[I got the samples ready for transportation.] Reena said while holding a bag.

[Noted. I got the information as well.] Saren said. [Thane, we are done here. I'm calling the ship for pick-up outside the base.]

[Understood, I'll move towards the extraction point.] Thane responded.

{Bird Eye, we got the information and the samples. Requesting a shuttle for extraction in about thirty minutes, over.}

{Noted SPECTRE team, Shuttle will be at the extraction zone in thirty. Bird Eye out.}

****October 13, 2574, 1300 Hours, System Alliance Calendar, Deca-5 system, **_**Exodus**_** Station, Orbit of Phoenix Colony.****

Exodus station, one of the fifteen ODP (Orbital Defense Platforms) around Phoenix colony and the command center for all the orbital defense units of the colony, was swarming with activity at the current moment.

"Okay people, I want to know what's happening." Admiral Petrovsky said as he entered the command center.

"Sir." One of the many men and women inside saluted before answering, "One of our probes has detected multiple objects in slip-space approaching the system. We are currently trying to identify the signatures."

"How much time we have before the objects enter the system?"

"According to the data, we have twenty four to twenty seven hours before the object arrives."

"Sir! ONI has identified the objects as multiple Loyalist Covenant ships," an Unggoy informed him.

"How many ships are we talking about here, ensign."

"Approximately one hundred and fifty, give or take a couple

ships."

"Alright. Communications, contact High-Com, tell them that it is possible that we will need reinforcements. Also, send a message to the checkpoints in both sides of the relay, tell them that this system is under lockdown. Not one ship is allowed to enter the system without my or any other superior officer in the Alliance's permission. The merchant ships that are in the system are to return through the relay. And finally start the evacuation of the planet. Put all the ships in the system under Red-Alert until further notice."

"Sir!" The personnel in the station saluted before doing what they were ordered to do.

October 13, 2172, 1315 Hours, Citadel Council Calendar, Deca-5 system, Turian Frigate **_New Horizon**_**, Checkpoint around Relay-314.**

Captain Brieus Palilus was slightly surprised by the sudden Red-Alert status that all the ships in the system were under. That was until he received a message from _Exodus_ Station saying that Phoenix colony was going to be attacked by Loyalist Covenant forces.

Brieus wasn't sure what to make out of the situation to be honest, he only knew that the Loyalist Covenant were once part of the Covenant that the Humans fought against nearly five decades ago. But if the Alliance went under Red-Alert just knowing that there was a high possibility of getting attacked, then this was a serious threat. He had seen some of the Alliance's ships in combat before, having fought alongside them during the defense of Pheiros station, but now his ships were going to experience firsthand what the Alliance's enemies were capable of in the defense of Phoenix colony.

"Send a message to the Council and the Hierarchy. Tell them that Phoenix colony received an alert of a possible attack in twenty four to twenty seven hours, as well that Relay-314 is under lockdown in order to prevent civilian casualties. Also, inform them to prepare a reinforcement fleet just in case."

"Sir," The one in charge of communications answered.

"Inform _Exodus_ Station that my ships will defend the Relay at all costs, and also that we will provide help in the colony defense if needed or asked."

After that, the many men and women aboard his ship went to do their respective duties. After some minutes of waiting, Brieus got a response from _Exodus_ Station.

"Sir, Admiral Petrovsky says thanks for the support, he also informs us that if we have any soldiers aboard that we send them to the colony to help with the evacuation efforts and the defense in the ground."

"Understood. Tell the fleet to send shuttles to the colony along with all our ground forces aboard."

The Turian managing communications nodded before turning to deliver the message to the rest of their group. In space, multiple dropships,

both from the Relay and the Phoenix defense fleet, could be seen heading towards the surface of the planet, all of them with soldiers ready to defend the colony from any kind of threat.

****A/N:** And here's another chapter ended in a cliffhanger of sorts hehe xD Now I want to apologize (again) for the long wait, this past weeks were full of schoolwork, also I'm not sure when I'll be able to update the next chapter because finals are coming D:! But I promise that I'll upload it as soon as I can.**

****Please review the story, I want to know your opinions about the story. Until next update bye :p****

9. Phoenix's Defense Part I

****The Next Great Journey****

****A/N:** And I'm back with a new chapter. Sorry for the long wait I had to study for the finals. Thanks again to everyone who clicked favorite or follow and also to the ones that took the time to post a review.**

****IMPORTANT NOTICE #1:** I want to thank Lord Izanagi for Beta read the chapter for all my grammatical errors, Thank you very much.**

****IMPORTANT NOTICE#2:** I changed the format of the Codex of the story, I think that it will be easier to read and understand it in this new version. So if you want to check it out go ahead. :P It has been updated to current events in the story.**

****IMPORTANT NOTICE #3:** I'm not sure if I should change the rating of this fiction to M. Can someone please tell me what do you think about that? I would appreciate that.**

****Now onto the chapter.****

"Speaking"

'Thoughts'

[Radio Communications, Ground forces-Ground forces, and Ship-Ship]

{Ground to Ship Communications}

Flash back of previous chapter(s)

Flash Back

'Messages on Screen'

****Sound Effects****

Line Break just shows a change of scenery.

****Disclaimer:** I don't own Halo or Mass Effect, both belong to their respective owners.**

Chapter 9: Phoenix's Defense, Part I

****October 13, 2172, 1430 Hours, Citadel Council Calendar, Widow System, Citadel Station, Presidium, Council Chambers.****

[Here is Citadel News-Net with Valera Nera. Minutes ago, the Citadel Council announced that the Quarrians, as of right now, are welcome again into the Citadel government. When we asked the Council why the sudden change regarding the Quarrians situation, Councilor Tevos responded with this, "The exile that the Quarrian people have lived through in the past three hundred years, was a punishment imparted on them because of the breaking of the laws concerning AI's at the time. After all these last three centuries, the Council feels that the Quarrians have learned from their mistakes, and also that they have earned the right once again to be part of the Citadel Government."

There have been rumors that the Quarrians are being relocated inside the Eagle Nebula, when we asked the Council about this, they respondedâ€¦]

Tevos turned off the news at that moment. Having heard quite enough, she and the other two Councilors proceeded to attend to more important matters.

"The Quarrians' acceptance of our offer is quite welcome. They have already sent a few of their best scientific minds to help with our projects. Though tensions between the Admiralty can be felt, for now that doesn't represent a big problem, but with time it will become a nuisance when dealing with them," Sparatus said.

"Then, when the time comes, we will deal with that particular problem. For now, we should focus on securing our borders, Valern has been telling me that there has been some interesting events happening in the Terminus Systems," Tevos said while looking at Valern on the last part.

Valern took the hint and started to explain the situation, "STG spies on Omega have reported sightings of multiple Humans on the station. At first, we thought that they had come to the station for merchant purposes, but after some time we discovered that the Humans present in the station are either soldiers and/or scientists. We have also noticed that the Humans always go to either the reactor zone, or the mining facilities of the station. STG suspect that the Alliance has some kind of deal with Aria; the great number of military ships of the Alliance entering the sector frequently also adds to our suspicions."

"It is possible. After all, the Alliance insisted on putting patrols on the outside borders of the Terminus' to locate the infected ship. It is possible that they made some kind of deal with Aria in order to take pirates and mercenaries off of their backs. It is a brilliant move, but what could they offer to Aria in order to get such a liberty in the Terminus'?" Sparatus said.

"Like you said, Sparatus, they probably are completing their part of the deal only to locate the infected ship, though what the Alliance is giving to Aria is worrisome," Tevos pointed out.

"I already have agents on the matter. We shouldâ€¦"

At that moment, Sparatus' personal terminal beeped, interrupting Valern in the process.

"It's from the Primarch," Sparatus said, a bit surprised.

He activated the terminal in order to see a holographic projection of Primarch Victus.

[Primarch.] Sparatus greeted, wanting to get to the point of the transmission right away.

Primarch Victus, getting the silent hint, cut direct to the point, [Councilors, a few minutes ago, we received a message from the security checkpoint of Relay-314. Captain Palilus reported a sudden military mobilization of the Alliance's forces inside the Deca-5 system. I'm talking about a total lockdown of the system and Relay from both sides. The colony of Phoenix is being evacuated as we speak, and I have received reports that reinforcements are coming towards the Deca-5 system. Palilus informs me that the Alliance received an alert that the Covenant Loyalist sent a fleet of about one hundred and fifty ships towards the colony. Councilors, Captain Palilus is requesting a reinforcement fleet ready on our side of the Relay just in case it's needed.]

[What about the merchant ships in the system, and the Citadel population on the planet? What's the Alliance doing with them?] Tevos asked.

[All the merchant ships were sent back through the Relay, and the civilians on the planet, all of them, are being evacuated as I said before. Ground troops from Palilus' ships are helping in the evacuation and in the soon-to-be defense of the colony.]

[Inform Palilus that a reinforcement fleet will be ready in about seventy two hours.] Sparatus said.

[Councilor, I don't think that we would make it in time if the Alliance needs reinforcements. The defense fleet of the colony numbers barely in around thirty ships, and fifteen defense platforms. The Loyalist fleet coming towards the system is around one hundred and fifty ships, and it will arrive within twenty-four to twenty-seven hours.]

Sparatus swore at that. If the data was accurate, which he believed it was, an attack of that magnitude will devastate the colony and military forces on the colony greatly if reinforcements didn't arrive in time.

[Primarch, do whatever it takes to prepare the reinforcement fleet as soon as you can. Just remember that we can't pull out most of our ships on the borders. If we do so, we would have two or three colonies getting attacked in the next day by pirates or mercenaries. Be wise choosing the ships for the reinforcement fleet. What can you tell me about the Alliance? Are they sending reinforcements as well?]

[The reports say that the Alliance is sending reinforcements, but it will take them time to arrive at the system. For now, we can only prepare our own reinforcements to aid the Alliance if the need

arises.]

Sparatus nodded at that as the Primarch disconnected the line.

"Valern, I suppose that you have STG agents in the ships stationed on the Relay?" Sparatus asked.

"Affirmative."

"Good, tell them to analyze everything of the upcoming battle. This incoming fight, while unwanted, would be informative to us regarding the capabilities of the Alliance and its enemies."

Valern nodded before sending a message to the STG agents on the Deca-5 system.

October 14, 2574, 1330 Hours, System Alliance Calendar, Deca-5 system, **_Exodus**_** Station, Orbit around Phoenix Colony.**

Admiral Petrovsky was currently observing the tactical screen, which occupied two-thirds of one of the walls in the command center. The reason of why the command center had a big screen was to facilitate the observation of all the incoming information from the system.

He had currently fifty-five ships under his command, which included the Fast Response Fleet (FRF) Alpha. There were also fifteen ODP, of which ten were positioned around the colony while the other five were in the moon's orbit. The reason of such a move was to lure the Loyalist in to a filing of security when they station their ships just outside the maximum range of the ODPs around the planet, but in reality they would be inside the range of the five ODPs orbiting the moon. And finally, he had the ten military satellites in orbit above the colony, ready to fire a Shiva-class nuclear missile at a moment's notice.

He had ordered five of his ships, two UNSC Destroyers and three UNSC Charon Frigates, to be stationed around the Relay with the other five Citadel ships. He just hoped that his defense fleet could hold the Loyalists long enough until the Alliance's reinforcements arrived.

"How much time left before Infinity's battle group arrives at the system?" Petrovsky asked.

"They won't be arriving, sir. Infinity's battle group was rerouted minutes ago towards a system under Black Alert. High-Com is sending the FRF-Echo to aid us. They will arrive within six hours," responded an ensign managing communications.

"Towards what system was Infinity's battle group rerouted?"

"The only thing that High-Com told us is that the system is within the Terminus Systems."

'God! They found the infected ship, and if the system is under Black Alert, that means that the Flood has successfully infested an entire planet, or that it is in the process of doing so!' Petrovsky thought with an expression of realization and shock.

"How's the evacuation of the colony going?" Petrovsky asked, trying to focus on his current dilemma.

"97% of the colony has been evacuated sir. We have estimated that it will takes us another two hours to finish the evacuation."

"Understood. Tell the ships thatâ€|"

"Sir! I got incoming energy signatures close to Faron," an Unggoy managing the sensors of the station announced. Faron was the largest planet in the Deca-5 system. It was a gaseous planet rich in Helium, but also full of enormous and powerful storms.

"Are they Slip-Space or storm signatures?" Petrovsky asked.

"Slip-Space signatures, the ships will be arriving within seconds now."

"Understood. Focus the tactical screen on that sector. Communications, contact Fleet Master Qunu, tell him that he and his ships are to engage the enemy after our first salvo from the ODP are fired. Also, send a message to the fleet, tell them to deploy all fighter squadrons."

No sooner did Admiral Petrovsky relay his orders, hundreds of fighters were deployed in the void of space. But just at the same time as the fighters were deployed, around one hundred and fifty Loyalist ships exited Slip-space.

"Sir! Confirmed Loyalist contacts close to Faron. I'm reading five CSO-Class Supercarriers, thirty CAS-Class Assault Carriers, fifty-eight CCS-Class Battlecruisers, thirty-five CPV-Class Destroyers, and twenty-eight SDV-Class Corvettes. They sum a total of one hundred and fifty six enemy ships, sir."

Petrovsky only looked at the tactical screen, trying to come with some kind of strategy that could implement the one that he had already. The tactical screen showed the colony defense fleet holding position, while the FRF-Alpha was moving towards the enemy fleet. The ships on the relay were also holding position, watching the events that were about to be unfolded in front of them.

"Sir, enemy ships have just stopped outside the maximum range of our planetary ODPs. They have also deployed hundreds of fighters and boarding parties," someone said.

"What about our lunar ODPs?" Petrovsky asked, "Are they in range?"

"They are within range."

"Tell them to open fire on the supercarriers while Fleet Master Qunu concentrates fire on the battlecruisers and destroyers. Also, give the squadrons the green light to engage the enemy fighters."

A few seconds after Admiral Petrovsky relayed his orders, five projectiles, coming from the moon of Phoenix, were seen in the

darkness that was space. Moving at incredible speeds, the five projectiles raced towards the Loyalist fleet, the only signal that they were there being the blue tail that was behind them. The Loyalist ships tried to disperse themselves in order to avoid the lethal projectiles, but either way all but one of the five shots impacted with the enemy ships.

Two of the 3000 ton projectiles impacted two CCS-Class Battlecruisers, obliterating them with a force of 51.56 gigatons of TNT. But even then, both projectiles continued in their path to destroy a second ship, this ship being one of the CSO-Class Supercarriers. The ship took both impacts, shaking violently before exploding in a flash of light that consumed another three SDV-Class Corvettes. The other two shots that reached their mark, destroyed two CAS-Class Assault Carriers and crippled another CSO-Class Supercarrier.

The Loyalist responded in return, shooting a barrage of plasma torpedoes to the incoming FRF-Alpha while, and at the same time, they moved their ships out of the range of the lunar ODPs. The FRF-Alpha took the barrage of incoming plasma torpedoes head on. Shooting out some of them with plasma torpedoes of their own, or in some cases, shooting them out with a tactical EMP missile that disrupted the magnetic fields holding the plasma together, making it dissipate in space. But not all of the torpedoes were intercepted, as forty of them managed to impact their targets. Two SDV-Class Corvettes exploded, followed next by a UNSC-Class Destroyer.

By that time, the reloading time for the lunar ODPs finished, firing five new projectiles to the retreating Loyalist fleet. This time all of the projectiles made impact with a ship, but they only managed to destroy three CCS-Class Battlecruisers and four CPV-Class Destroyers.

Between all this chaos, hundreds, if not thousands of fighters were engaged in combat. Some of them trying to keep the enemy from reaching the ODPs while others focused on taking down as many enemy fighters as possible. But in a fight where the enemy outnumbers you, it was just a matter of time before the Loyalist reached the lunar ODPs.

"Status report, people," Admiral Petrovsky asked.

"Sir, Loyalist forces have exited the maximum range of our lunar ODPs. Also, we have lost three ships so far and around one third of all our fighters. Loyalist Phantoms and boarding ships are closing in on the lunar ODPs."

"Understood. Communications! Divert two-fifths of our defense fleet to aid the FRF-Alpha on taking the Loyalist down. Also, send the available light corvettes and frigates ground side. We will need them when the fighting starts in the colony."

"Sir?"

"It's just a matter of time before the Loyalist reach planet-side, son. Relay the order and also tell all the ships and stations on the system to enact the Cole Protocol."

"Sir! Yes Sir!"

"Admiral! The Loyalist have managed to board two of the lunar ODPs!"

"Tell them that if they can't hold them off, then they are to evacuate and destroy the station."

Petrovsky looked at the tactical screen after relaying his orders. He could see how the battle was going so far, it was in their favor for now, but it was only a matter of time before the Loyalists gained the upper hand. He saw as most of the FRF-Alpha, alongside the ten ships from the defense fleet that he sent to aid them, were destroyed already by the superior numbers of the Loyalist. The Loyalist weren't faring any better, as they had been reduced from hundred and fifty-six ships to one hundred and twenty. But they were now moving forward, 'What are they up to now?' Petrovsky wondered.

"Sir! Increasing Slip-space energy signatures detected!"

Just as he heard the report, he watched as two CAS-Class Assault Carriers entered Slip-space, just to appear some seconds later on top of the lunar ODPs. What followed next was considered total annihilation, as the Assault Carriers fired their energy projectors on two of the ODPs, while the other three reoriented themselves to fire on the new threat. The two ODPs never stood a chance, as just seconds after being fired upon with the energy projector, they exploded in a flash of light, creating two small stars for a few seconds. But the massacre didn't stop there, just as the two stations exploded, the two Assault Carriers fired hundreds of plasma torpedoes to the other three ODPs before being destroyed by the combined fire of six ODPs orbiting the colony.

"Status report!" Petrovsky commanded.

"Sir, we lost four of the five lunar ODPs, the last one is heavily damaged and lost all power. Sir, they can't fire their MAC anymore."

"Tell the personnel in that station to evacuate, now." Petrovsky said.

"Sending message sir."

"Sir, what's left of the FRF-Alpha is making their way back towards us. Also, we have lost over half of our fighters' squadrons. Loyalist forces are pushing towards our position now."

On the tactical screen Petrovsky watched as only five ships made their way back to the colony. Those five ships being what was left of the FRF-Alpha. He also noticed as ninety Loyalist ships closed the distance between them and the colony. 'It appears that this battle is almost over. With only ten ODPs remaining and around twenty ships, of which five are heavily damaged, there isn't a lot that I can do.'

"How much time before reinforcements arrive?" Petrovsky asked.

"They'll be here in around three hours, sir."

"Understood. Tell the rest of the fleet that protecting the remaining ODPs are our priority, now. If they fall, then we will follow soon alongside the system." Petrovsky waited until his orders were relayed before continuing, "Have the Loyalist made a move towards the Relay?"

"Negative. It appears that they are focusing on taking the colony, first."

Petrovsky nodded at that. It was an intelligent move, that way they could establish a strong presence on the colony and get supplies to use once they took the Relay. 'IF they take the Relay.' Petrovsky reminded himself.

Outside the battle continued on, hundreds of fighters tried to reach the ODPs only to be shot down by Alliance's fighters or the barrage of missiles from the frigates. Destroyers from the Alliance focused their fire on the incoming Battlecruisers and Destroyers, while the ODPs concentrated in the Assault Carriers and Supercarriers. Or at least that's how it looked at the beginning, after the Loyalist ships were in distance to engage the Alliance's ships in ship-ship knife combat, the Carriers, both Assault and Super variants, opened fire with their energy projectors against the ODPs.

All that stood in the way of the Energy Projector was burnt to ashes, and that included six of the remaining ten ODPs. Though the significant damage didn't go unpunished. The remaining four ODPs opened fire on the Carriers, destroying five CAS-Class Assault Carriers, two CPV-Class Destroyers, and one CSO-Class Supercarrier. Alliance's CCS-Class Battlecruisers were concentrating their fire on the remaining three CSO-Class Supercarriers, managing to destroy one that was already damaged and another one which had its shield weakened.

Marathon-Class Cruisers engaged the enemy at multiple angles, opening fire with all the weapons that it had. Hundreds of fighters perished at the hands of the firepower that the Marathon-Class Cruisers had. Plasma torpedoes and Archer missiles flew towards their targets, destroying everything in their path. Fighters and bombers flew between ships, deploying their loads in the already weakened ships in hope of destroying something important. An intense dogfight was going on between the debris and the still functioning ships. The pilots not only trying to survive the enemy fighter's fire, but also the constant fire of missile, plasma, and energy weapons of the bigger ships.

Some of the pilots that had already used all of the ammunition in their fighters, used their ships as decoys to lure the enemy into tight spaces, in hopes of outmaneuvering them and making them crash into another ship. Others used their fighters to intercept enemy ones, forcing them to change direction and give their comrades an opportunity to strike them down.

The remaining Frigates coordinated their MAC fire on one of the Assault Carriers. The ship shook at the impact of several MACs, losing all of its shields just to be hit by hundreds of Archer missiles and plasma torpedoes. In a final move of desperation, the ship accelerated towards the frigates, opening fire with everything that it had. Two Frigates perished, alongside another three Corvettes, but before the Assault Carrier could deal more damage it

was struck again, this time by the MAC cannon of one of the ODPs. The projectile crossed the ship from stern to bow without problems, exiting from its target. It kept going until it impacted another Assault Carrier, damaging it severely. The structure of the Assault Carrier, which was already heavily damaged, couldn't hold anymore, causing the ship to be bisected in different parts before exploding and falling towards the planet's surface.

"Sir! Loyalist forces managed to board the station. Also, we can't hold the enemy ships any longer, we have five still functioning ships on orbit, while the enemy has seventy-seven ships closing on our position."

"Send the order to retreat. I want our remaining ships to rendezvous at the Relay. How many Frigates and Corvettes do we have ground side?"

"We've got two Stalwart-Class Frigates, and three SDV-Class Light Corvettes ready to assist ground troops."

"Understood. Ensign, put me on the speakers of our remaining ODPs."

"You are up, Sir," someone said seconds after Petrovsky gave the order.

[To all remaining personnel aboard the Orbital Defense Platforms. this is Admiral Petrovsky. All personnel are to evacuate the stations. Marines, hold off the Loyalists until everyone else evacuates. This battle isn't over, we are just changing the playing field. Good luck to everyone, Admiral Petrovsky out.]

"You heard me, people, all of you to the shuttles!" Petrovsky said to everyone in the command center.

"But what about you, Admiral?" A Sangheili asked him after noticing that he wasn't going to the shuttles with everyone else.

"Someone has to coordinate our remaining forces, son." Petrovsky answered with a slight smirk.

The Sangheili nodded with respect at the Admiral before going towards the shuttles. After all, in his culture it was considered a great honor when someone stayed behind to hold off the enemy in order to give the rest of his/her troops another opportunity to fight.

October 14, 2574, 1650 Hours, System Alliance Calendar, Deca-5 system, **_Exodus**_** Station, Armory, Orbit around Phoenix Colony.**

Gunnery Sergeant Edward Buck was not having a good day, or night, depending on your perspective of time in space. Approximately twenty-four hours ago, he had been called for duty in order to help in the evacuation of the colony, when it was supposed to be one of those strange free days off of duty. He didn't mind it, though, it was part of the job and he was happy to do anything that helped in saving lives. But what he really thought was some kind of divine punishment for an unknown reason, was when he had to go to _Exodus_ station for resupplies, only for the Loyalist to arrive at that

precise movement. He wasn't much of a fan of fighting on space stations and ships, he didn't feel in control of the situation because his life now was in the hands of others. One mistake on their part, as small as it could be, and he could be dead along with everyone else in the station.

He ducked for cover under some crates with weapons, just in time for the plasma rounds to pass harmlessly above his cover. He popped out of cover to shoot at a Sangheili with his BR55HB SR or Battle Rifle. The three round burst impacted the shields of the Sangheili, destroying them after a few bursts and finally piercing its armor, killing it. Buck took cover again as rounds from plasma pistols passed above him.

Buck had been in the armory, getting weapons in crates to take towards the surface of the colony when the Loyalist arrived at the system. After that, he and the other two soldiers in the armory started to pile the weapons in crates even faster in order to transport them to their destination. Or at least, that was the plan some minutes ago. Now the plan for the three of them was to survive and hold off the Loyalist assault. 'I guess I could be glad that the Loyalist boarded through the armory. This way I don't have to worry about ammunition,' he thought, chuckling lightly.

Buck looked to his left, seeing an unknown Kig-Yar, which was helping him earlier with the crates, firing at the enemy with a carbine. Looking to his right, he watched as another unknown, Human this time, fired at the Loyalist with an M7/Caseless or Submachine gun. He was glad that at least now, Humanity had an alliance with most of the alien races out there in their space of the galaxy.

While most of the former Covenant races were now allies and members of the Systems Alliance, some members of each respective race, mainly the ones who were more indoctrinated in the old Covenant, were still sided with the Loyalists. Humans were not different either; while not in the Covenant Loyalists, there were the modern 'Terrorist groups' for lack of a better word.

Buck looked at the enemy's position and saw that most of them were near their insertion ship. He took out a fragmentation grenade and threw it towards the enemy. Naturally, the Loyalist saw it coming but the constant fire from Buck and his comrades prevented them from moving away from the grenade. It exploded, killing the Loyalist who didn't have shields, and leaving the Sangheili without their shields, only to be killed by a secondary explosion, courtesy of a plasma grenade that the unknown Kig-Yar threw.

Seeing no more enemies nearby, Buck exited cover to check outside the armory. Seeing no enemy presence, he returned back inside.

"We need to get these crates to the launching bay before all Pelicans and Phantoms depart," he said to the other two occupants of the room.

"And what about us? If we don't hurry up, we could be left behind. The crates will only slow us down, and there's no assurance that either the Pelicans and/or Phantoms will have enough room for us three after being loaded with crates." The other Human pointed out.

"If we can't depart in one of the shuttles then we will make our way to the pods hangar. I saw some Orbital Insertion Pods (OIP) earlier on my way here."

"He has a point. Besides, if we don't take the crates to the shuttles, then we would have done all this work for nothing," The Kig-Yar said, earning a glare from the other marine.

"To hell with the crates! Our survival is more important. Besidesâ€¦!" The marine never finished his sentence, because at that moment, Buck had struck him with his rifle in the stomach.

"Listen, Private, and listen well. We will take those crates to the shuttles. If we don't do it, then we will be scarce in ammunition once ground combat evolves into a grand scale conflict. DO I MAKE MYSELF CLEAR." Buck said, adding a bit of exaggeration and making the last part not even sounding like a question.

"Yessir," The Private said between breaths.

"Good. Now let's move out, people."

The three of them piled the crates in three different cars. Moving out of the armory, all of them kept an eye on their motion sensors. While most people would think that fighting the Loyalist would be hard because of the confusion between allies and foes, the Alliance had changed the designs of the armors used by their soldiers. They were irrelevant changes toward the function of the armor, but they helped distinguish between allies and foes. Also, every soldier of the Alliance is required to have a nanochip inserted in the back of their skull. This helped to identify them as allies when using the motion sensors, showing themselves as a yellow mark in the sensors.

The three of them moved through the corridors of the station, not once encountering any Loyalist presence. The alarms of the station being the only sound accompanying them. Buck used the time to think how things would be on the surface now. Surely the Loyalists had stepped foot on the colony, by now. He wondered where the rest of his team was. But at least he knew that they would look out for each other. After all, that's what family does.

Turning around in one of the many corridors, the three soldiers came to a sudden stop. On the side of the corridor was a big window, and through it they could see the devastation that was unfolding outside. Fighters engaged in multiple dogfights, while ships were in ship-to-ship knife combat. The frigates and destroyers not backing down at the presence of the still functioning Supercarrier that approached them. They saw as the carrier opened fire with most of its arsenal on the three ships opposing it, all of which returned fire with their MACs, missiles, and plasma torpedoes. The defense guns of the carrier managed to take down most of the missiles, but not enough to evict the fall of its shields after the projectiles impacted the ship. The three ships took the incoming fire head on, putting their defense gun at maximum use, working the three of them together in synchronization in order to take most of the incoming projectiles out. But still, the projectiles that impacted the ships and managed to deactivate their shields, only to be finished by a Battlecruiser that was nearby.

At that moment, Buck looked back at the corridor, a focused expression on his face.

"Let's keep moving," he said to his companions.

The other two followed Buck towards the hangar of the station. Arriving at a nearby corridor, they encountered a Loyalist presence. Taking cover immediately, they heard as the enemy fired impacted the crates and walls of the corridor. Buck looked through the side of the crate and opened fire with his rifle, taking down a pair of Unggoy in the front. His companions followed suit and opened fire on the single Sangheili in the corridor, taking him out in a matter of seconds. The other marine threw a grenade behind the pair of Kig-Yars without them noticing. Some seconds later, and shrapnel filled the bodies of the now dead Kig-Yars.

"Is it me, or was that too easy?" the Human asked.

Buck shrugged, not really caring about that. He was looking at his sensor to see if there was someone flanking them or in camouflage. After seeing no activity in the sensor, he indicated his companions to keep moving. Arriving at an elevator, the three proceeded to enter, going down one at a time because of the lack of space inside.

Once the three of them finished their descend to the hangar, they only needed to arrive at one of the shuttles.

"Alright, you two take the crates to one of the shuttles." Buck commanded to the other two marines with him.

They both nodded at that and started to move to a nearby Phantom. Buck turned to move towards the officer in charge of the evacuation. It was kind of hard to find him between the running marines and technicians of the station, but Buck had, eventually, found him.

"How's the evacuation going?" Buck asked.

"So far, so good. The people that you see in the hangar now are the only ones left in the station."

"Did the Admiral say where we are regrouping?"

"He didn't. I heard that he is staying in the station to make sure we got the necessary time to leave."

"But wouldn't the VI of the station handle that?" Buck asked, a bit surprised by the news.

"Normally they would, but between all this chaos and fighting outside, they have stopped working after we were hit."

Buck nodded at that before turning towards one of the remaining shuttles. But just before he entered, the door that lead to the hangar exploded, and with it Loyalist forces entered the hangar, firing at every non-Loyalist in their path.

Buck took out his Battle Rifle and took cover in a nearby truck. Alongside him were another few marines, nine more, if he counted them

right. The shuttles immediately took out of the station, all of them except one, which opted to wait for the remaining marines.

Buck saw the shuttle that was waiting for them; he was about to order everyone to back off towards the shuttle when a few Unggoy with Fuel Rod Cannons entered the Hangar. They started to fire on the shuttle, while the Sangheili and Kig-Yar gave covering fire. The shuttle, seeing that it wouldn't be able to take the remaining marines out, started to take off. The Pelican was about to accelerate out of the station when multiple rounds from the Fuel Rod Cannon impacted one of its wings. The Pelican fell on the hangar, only to be hit again by multiple rounds. In the end, an enormous fireball was created from the downed ship.

Buck, like the rest of the marines in the hangar, started to fire blindly at the Loyalists, being that they were pinned down by the enemy fire. Some hit their targets, either killing, wounding, or weakening the shields of the enemy. Others weren't so lucky, causing their aim to go wide. After a while some marines popped out of cover to throw grenades at the enemy position, but in the end they weren't fast enough to take cover again after throwing the explosives.

After the explosion, the rest of the marines moved towards the enemy position, firing on their way and killing anyone in their path. Buck got close enough that he opted to take his pistol out. Taking shots at the remaining Loyalists, the marines managed to kill them all in a matter of minutes.

"Now what? How do we get out of the station?" One of the remaining marines asked.

"Don't worry about that, I saw some Orbital Insertion Pods close to the armory in the upper deck. We just need to get there and use them as our means of escape," Buck answered.

"That may work for you, but if you didn't notice, we aren't ODSTs. We aren't trained to support that kind of insertion."

Buck sighed before replying to the scared marines. "Look, I know that all of you don't have the training nor the experience to deploy planet-side via pod. But I have, and I'll tell you this: if you follow my instructions once we are deploying, then you will only have to worry about not crashing your head on the walls of the pod."

The marines took a moment to consider this, before nodding. Taking this as the signal that he was in charge, he started to move alongside the remaining five marines towards the upper deck. Arriving at the elevators, all of them got inside.

Once in the upper deck, they kept moving through the destroyed corridors, catching glimpses of the battle outside. It looked like the Loyalists were now concentrating on the planet while some of their boarding ships assaulted the remaining two ODPs, and that was counting Exodus Station.

October 14, 2574, 1840 Hours, System Alliance Calendar, Deca-5 system, **Exodus**** Station, Command Center, Orbit around Phoenix Colony.**

Admiral Petrovsky looked at the still functioning tactical screen in

the wall. He only had left two ODPs, counting this one of course, and one more destroyer in orbit. He had managed to take another fifteen enemy ships until now, but he knew that his luck was over. The remaining destroyer was heading to the Relay now to take reparations on the other side. The two ODPs were now so damaged that trying to charge the MAC would destroy the station because of the energy levels needed in the reactors.

His only hope now were the incoming reinforcements, which were supposed to arrive in some minutes now. Though the Loyalist proved to be more of a challenge than the former Covenant was, they were also unpredictable. The first few hours of combat they had manage to take a lot of enemy ships in just a matter of minutes. But after the lunar ODPs were destroyed, the Loyalist became even harder to eliminate. From the initial seventy-seven ships that came towards Phoenix, there were now only sixty-two remaining ships. And between all those ships, most of the remaining ones were of Battlecruiser class or above.

Petrovsky looked towards one of the screens which showed the corridors of the station. HE saw as some marines still in the station were in the Orbital Insertion Pods hangar. And with them was one ODSI telling them what to do in order to survive the entry. In that moment he felt pride. Pride that in moments like this the different branches of the Alliance's military forgot the competition between them in order to survive.

Once he saw that every marine was in the pods he opened the hangar and gave the master command of the entire section of the hangar, to the ODSI's pod. He saw as every pod was launched towards the planet, and then turned towards another terminal. Typing some codes in it he waited for a bit.

[Authorization code needed to confirm the launch of twelve SHIVA-class missiles.]

'Twelve? The other three satellites must have been destroyed then.' Petrovsky thought. "Authorization code: Zulu, Echo, 9847623, Indigo, Delta, 09869." Petrovsky said loud for the VI.

[Authorization code confirmed. Please designate the targets for every missile.] The VI said as another terminal popped from the desk.

Petrovsky pressed the ships showed in the terminal. Targeting twelve ships before pressing the go button.

[Target confirmed, firing SHIVA missiles in T-minus thirty seconds.]

Petrovsky activated another command in the station, watching as hundreds of missiles exited the station and headed for their respective targets. Seconds later the SHIVA missiles followed suit.

The Loyalist ships acted immediately as every point defense gun in the multiple ships opened fire on the missiles, managing to destroy multiple ones. Petrovsky watched as the ARCHER missiles decreased in number, as well as some of the SHIVA missiles were shut down too. In the end he looked towards the window just as five bright flashes of

light were seen. The incoming shockwave was powerful enough to take out his valance, making him fall.

Standing up he saw as multiple ships were now in debris, while other were heavily damaged, all of those now heading towards the planet. Then one of the alarms in the command center started to beep, he looked to the cracked screen that showed the tactical information of the system. In it he saw multiple energy signatures spikes.

Looking out towards the general direction, he saw as multiple black with blue and purple portals opened, and from each of them a ship entered real space. He looked at the tactical screen again, seeing that there were twenty-six ships heading towards the colony now. All of them ready to destroy the remaining fifty-three Loyalist ships.

October 14, 2574, 1905 Hours, System Alliance Calendar, Deca-5 system, Orbital Insertion Pod, Heading towards Phoenix Colony.

Buck looked through the small window in his pod, managing to catch a glimpse of the bright flash that suddenly appeared on orbit. He knew what could cause that kind of flash and he didn't like it at this moment. He only tightened his hold in the pod, waiting for the incoming shockwave.

He wasn't disappointed, as some seconds after the flash, he felt the pod shake violently. He grabbed hold of the controls, trying to guide the pod through the entry, but the shockwave of the nuclear detonation was stronger. The pod moved some degrees to the side, which one Buck wasn't able to tell, but he knew that this was bad.

Entering the atmosphere of the planet, the pod started to heat at an alarming rate. The sirens inside the pod started beeping, signaling the compromise of the hull. Buck in that moment started to pray to whatever deity that was out there, hoping that this wasn't his last moment in reality.

After some intense and desperate seconds, the pod made it through the atmosphere mostly intact. Buck looked outside only to see a wasted land down below. Smoke came from what he presumed were cities, Loyalist ships could be seen in the skies, bombarding the ground below them, or in some cases using the energy projectors. Fighters were also present in the skies, fighting viciously between them. If he didn't know any better he would have thought that the dogfight in the skies was a free for all.

While he noticed the fight outside, he failed to see the incoming banshee. The pod kept descending, unbeknown to the banshee accelerating below. Normally the possibilities of hitting another object in the sky while descending were almost none, today wasn't Buck's normal day.

The pod descended at high speeds crashing in the process with part of the banshee. As expected, the banshee exploded because of the collision, while the pod went off course, spinning in multiple directions. Buck felt like throwing up at that moment, but he managed to hold it off in order to try and control the pod. He looked outside and saw one of the buildings approached furiously, so he took hold

inside the pod before it made impact. Entering and exiting the building, the pod crashed again in another building before implanting itself in yet another one.

The last thing that Buck saw was a Phantom flying above, before succumbing to unconsciousness.

****October 14, 2574, 1900 Hours, System Alliance Calendar, Unknown System, ONI Headquarters.****

Jason Patterson, head of ONI, was looking at the report of the going fight in the colony of Phoenix. He didn't like what he was reading, but at least he knew that reinforcements were already in the system.

Being he who had ordered Infinity's battle group to be rerouted to the Terminus Systems, he felt a bit responsible for the happenings in the Deca-5 systems. But being the head of ONI required him to think clearly, logically, and outside the box in a matter of seconds. Being that one of his prowlers had detected the infected ship in a distant planet, he had to change priorities. He didn't have to like it, but he still needed to do it.

[Sir, you got an incoming message from the director of Section III.] Patterson's secretary told him via intercom.

[Thanks Ms. Ross.]

He looked through his terminal. Locating the message, he open it.

_ '___To the Head of ONI, _

Security Code: 98576322541-516549635NKH

NOTE: The reading of the following information without the required authorization will result in charges of treason to the Systems Alliance and an execution for his/her crimes.

Director, I'm pleased to inform you that the construction of the new headquarters of our subdivision-C, also known as CERBERUS, is complete, and as such Phasethree of operation LIBRERIANWEB is finished. I recommend to wait a few more days to start phase four, in order to give GHOST team the necessary time to prepare for it. Also, I'm to inform you that The Illusive Man, or T.I.M. has started to put plans in action that will benefit the Systems Alliance, and make CERBERUS seem as a terrorist group to the Citadel Council, making them put their attention on them while we, ONI, operate in Citadel space without arousing much suspicion from their intelligence network, the STG.

As you already know, the successful mission that agents from STG took in Phoenix colony had managed to lead us towards one of their operational bases. While we know that the base isn't their main one, with time we will be able to locate many other installations.

**This message will be destroyed five seconds after being closed.**

Head Director of ONI Section III.'

Patterson smiled at the good news, typing a quick message to T.I.M. and requesting a meeting with the other members of High Command. He turned off the terminal and exited his office.

****A/N:** Again I want to apologize for the long wait. I'll assure you that it won't happen again, unless something really important comes up, but if that's the case I'll let you guys/girls know, just check my profile. Now you can see the plot of the story increasing up a bit. Also I would like to know what YOU think about the story so far so please REVIEW.**

****Until next time and HAPPY HOLYDAYS!****

10. Phoenix's Defense Part II

****The Next Great Journey****

****A/N:** And I'm back with a new chapter. Thanks again to everyone who clicked favorite or follow and also to the ones that took the time to post a review.**

****IMPORTANT NOTICE #1:** I want to thank Lord Izanagi for Beta read the chapter for all my grammatical errors, Thank you very much.**

****IMPORTANT NOTICE#2:** I changed the format of the Codex of the story, I think that it will be easier to read and understand it in this new version. So if you want to check it out go ahead. :P It has been updated to current events in the story.**

****Now onto the chapter.****

"Speaking"

'Thoughts'

[Radio Communications, Ground forces-Ground forces, and Ship-Ship]

{Ground to Ship Communications}

Flash back of previous chapter(s)

Flash Back

'Messages on Screen'

****Sound Effects****

Line Break just shows a change of scenery.

****Disclaimer:** I don't own Halo or Mass Effect, both belong to their respective owners.**

Chapter 10: Phoenix's Defense, Part II

Buck looked outside only to see a wasted land down below. Smoke came

from what he presumed were cities, Loyalist ships could be seen in the skies, bombarding the ground below them or in some cases using the energy projectors. Fighters were also present in the skies, fighting viciously between them. If he didn't know any better he would have thought that the dogfight in the skies was a free for all.

While he noticed the fight outside, he failed to see the incoming banshee. The pod kept descending, unbeknown to the banshee accelerating below. Normally the possibilities of hitting another object in the sky while descending were almost none, but today wasn't Buck's normal day.

The pod descended at high speeds crashing in the process with part of the banshee. As expected the banshee exploded because of the collision, while the pod went off course, spinning in multiple directions. Buck felt like throwing up at that moment, but he managed to hold it off in order to try and control the pod. He looked outside and saw as one of the building approached furiously, he took hold inside the pod before it made impact. Entering and exiting the building the pod crashed again in other building before implanting itself in another one.

The last thing that Buck saw was a Phantom flying above before succumbing to unconsciousness.

****October 14, 2574, 2334 Hours, Systems Alliance Calendar, Deca-5 system, Lumity City, Phoenix Colony.****

Buck awoke with a slight headache. Looking around he saw the state in which his insertion pod was. Putting it plainly, it was a complete mess. The ammunition for his weapons were scattered all around, sparks of electricity could be seen all around his peripheral vision, the glass that served as a window was cracked and Buck's helmet also had several cracks on the visor.

"Ugh, my head." Buck said as he grabbed his head with his two hands, "Stupid pod that can't fall right." He murmured.

Looking around he noticed that the front 'door' of the pod didn't opened automatically as it was supposed to do. 'Well, it looks like we are back to manual control.' He thought.

Pressing four buttons, each one of them in a corner of the door, the door hissed before being expelled outward. Looking outside the pod, Buck noticed that he was in some kind of balcony. Once outside, he turned towards the pod and took his BR55HB SR, Battle Rifle, alongside three cartridges for the rifle.

Moving to the edge of the balcony, Buck saw as Longswords, Broadswords, Falcons, Phantoms, Seraphs, and Pelicans moved in the middle of the night towards the north at high speeds. Looking down he noticed that he was at least three floors from the ground, as well that there was a lot of debris on the streets below.

[Gunnery Sergeant Edward Buck here, to any Systems Alliance units. Do you copy?]

[â€¦] Static

[I repeat, Gunnery Sergeant Edward Buck here, to any Systems Alliance units. Do you copy?]

[â€|]

"Dammit!" Buck said as he started to move inside the building.

Entering through one of the doors at the building, Buck activated the lantern attached to his Battle Rifle. Moving carefully through the hallway, he finally arrived at some emergency stairs. Opening the door he jumped backwards as the dead body of a fellow soldier dropped onto the floor.

He lined up his rifle at the stairs looking for any kind of threat. Finding nothing, he turned back towards the dead body to inspect it. Buck looked for anything useful, taking the helmet first in order to replace his broken one. Looking through the body a bit more, he found a pistol with only one magazine and a half a clip of ammunition left. Once the pistol was secured on his hip he took the dog-tags, putting them in one of his pockets before moving downstairs.

Buck deactivated the flashlight of his rifle in order to activate the night vision of his new helmet. Looking around the stairs, he spotted blood on the walls, a lot of blood of different colors. Ignoring the blood, he kept moving until arriving at another door that led to an alley adjacent to the building.

Once outside, Buck moved through the alley to the direction in which the drop and combat ships moved a while ago. Remembering his experience when he was in a similar situation back on New Mombasa (Earth) when the Covenant was invading the planet, he moved through the shadows trying to not step in the range of any street lights still functioning or making any kind of noise that would alert an awaiting sniper. Buck also took advantage of the destroyed vehicles on the streets, taking cover and surveying the streets with the scope of his Battle Rifle.

Having found no sign of activity, he moved ahead until he arrived at a plaza of sorts. He could see the remains of the defensive position in the area. Seeing the remains of what he supposed was a warthog being the first sign of any kind of ground combat in the area. He kept moving ahead, finding many bodies of both sides, his helmet still identifying the bodies as either friend or foe. Buck made sure that he took as many dog-tags as possible with him while looking for something useful.

After some minutes of inspecting the bodies, he decided to keep moving. Finally arriving at the building of a bank nearby, Buck spotted a still functioning terminal on the outside. Taking out a chip on the back of his helmet, he inserted it into the terminal.

_ 'Mobile military memory unit detected. Please type your identification code:' _ It read on the screen.

Buck did as asked, typing his service number alongside his name and date of birth. The chip started to download the VI of the city, also known as the Superintendent. The chip, while similar to the ones that the SPARTANS use to bring AIs to combat with them, was a standard

requirement for every soldier in the Systems Alliance military. This helped soldiers to better coordinate their attacks and locate zones of importance in the city(s) that they were fighting on.

Once the download finished, Buck started to move once again after locating an operations base in the map.

****October 15, 2574, 0020 Hours, Systems Alliance Calendar, Deca-5 system, Lumity City, Phoenix Colony.****

Lance Corporal Kojo 'Romeo' Agu looked through the scope of his SRS99D AM Sniper Rifle with the nocturnal vision of the scope activated. He took a deep breath before focusing the scope on the target. He waited a second and then pressed the trigger. The Zealot dropped dead, causing the rest of his unit to scatter, making them easy targets for the marines on the streets.

Hearing another shot next to him, he looked at the Turian that was helping him clear the zone. Returning to his task at hand, Romeo started to look for more targets.

"I have to admit it. Those Loyalist Covenant have good shield technology." The Turian commented.

"Really? It doesn't feel like it, after all I'm using the same amount of shots to kill the Sangheili." Romeo answered while shooting at an unsuspecting Kig-Yar.

"Well, it usually requires only one shot of the Widow to kill its target, two shots if the target is a strong biotic with good barriers. But here, I'm using two shots to kill the Loyalist Sangheili and they are using your standard shield." The Turian pointed out.

"Well Secuus, you are using your disruptor ammunition right?" At the Turian's nod he continues, "Then change it to your incendiary rounds, Loyalist energy shields are easier to shut down with any plasma based weaponry, and incendiary is as close as you would get to plasma right now."

Secuus followed the suggestion before shooting at the last Loyalist Sangheili down in the street. He noticed that while the shot didn't kill him with only one projectile, it managed to bring the shields down and cause some collateral damage.

[Overlord to sniper team Echo, do you copy?] Someone in the command center said.

[Affirmative Overlord, I hear you. What is it that you need?] Romeo asked while Secuus kept firing at the remaining Loyalist forces in the streets.

[Our sensors detected that someone has downloaded the Superintendent program from the city's mainframe. We are currently tracking the program, it is two clicks ****(A/N: 1 Click equals 1 kilometer.)**
****South of your position. Command wants your team to investigate.]**

[Understood, do we have any support for this operation?]

[Negative, if we move more units to investigate, then the Loyalist forces will be able to breach our front lines. Good luck Echo team, Overlord out.]

"Well Secuus, it looks like we have some hunting to do, so let's move out." Romeo said.

Secuus nodded before standing and following Romeo through the roof that they were perched on. Arriving at one side of the roof, both soldiers used the ropes that they installed on the wall to climb down the building. Down on the streets, both of them moved through the sidewalks, glancing at every corner before moving ahead. Explosions and the sounds of weapons being fired, being the only sounds accompanying them through the streets.

Secuus followed Romeo through the destroyed streets that now adorned the city. All the while keeping an eye out for any kind of ambushes. Thinking about his current situation, Secuus was glad that the Systems Alliance was a somewhat ally of the Citadel Government. With the Loyalist Covenant as an enemy of the Alliance, he shuddered at the thought of having to face them without Alliance's support. He knew that if it came to that, the Citadel would have a higher chance of losing a war against the Loyalists, unless they acted with extreme intelligence and caution against an enemy with a superior technological advantage in space. In ground combat on the other hand, their technology was almost in par, where the Loyalist had the advantage of plasma weaponry that made their shields almost useless, the Citadel had the advantage in ammunition and rate of fire to compensate. 'If it comes to that, then we would have to unite all Citadel races against the enemy if we want a bigger chance of winning. After all the Humans managed to survive for almost three decades against an enemy that was technologically superior to them in almost every technological branch.' Secuus thought to himself.

"Get down, there's movement ahead of us." Romeo said, taking Secuus out of his thoughts.

Both of them dropped to the floor, taking cover next to some cars close to the sidewalk, or in the sidewalk in some cases. Looking through what used to be the window of the car, Romeo and Secuus watched as various Ghosts and some Wraiths moved towards the direction that they came from.

[Overlord, Sniper team Echo here, do you copy?] Romeo said.

[Affirmative Echo team, what's your status?]

[We got a convoy of Loyalist Wraiths and Ghosts heading through 42nd street.]

[Copy that Echo team, we got a drone inbound to track them. Thanks for the intel, Overlord out.]

After waiting until the convoy was out of sight, both snipers kept moving ahead, that is until a particle beam round deactivated Romeo's shields. Both Romeo and Secuus took cover inside a store that was next to them, just in time to avoid another shot from the sniper.

"We got at least two snipers on the roofs. One of them is just on the street crossing the 42nd. Did you managed to track where the second shot came from?" Romeo said.

"Affirmative. The second shot was from the bridge just ahead, if we get out of here through the front then we are dead. Any suggestions?" Secuus answered.

"Well, I got some smoke grenades, but that will only let us get out of the building to reach a better position to kill the sniper. That is, if the sniper doesn't find where we are hiding."

"Not necessarily. My Widow rifle has a thermal scope attached. You can throw the smoke grenade and then I finish the other sniper."

"Well that solves one of the snipers, but what about the other one?"

"We can deal with that problem once we get rid of the first one." Secuus shrugged.

"All right then." Romeo answered as he took out a smoke grenade.

Aiming just outside the front door, Romeo threw the grenade. The sidewalk in front of the store immediately filled with grey smoke, making a big cloud where seeing through it was impossible without the right equipment. Secuus immediately exited the store before kneeling in the sidewalk in order to take aim. Seeing through the thermal scope of his Widow rifle, he saw a red outline of a Kig-Yar just fifty meters ahead. Taking a breath to calm his pulse, he steadied his aim before taking the shot. The Kig-Yar fell from the small bridge, dead before hitting the ground.

"Alright he is down." Secuus said.

"Good, now we have to locate the second sniper. This is the plan, you will position yourself behind those destroyed cars," Romeo said while pointing at some cars in the middle of the street that had a good angle of the sniper's presumed position, "while I will lure him out."

"Works for me."

"Just so you know, if something happens to my ass out there, then I'll come back from the dead to hunt you and kill you myself." Romeo said with some humor.

Secuus nodded while stiffening a laugh, but failing at it. Romeo took a moment to calm himself a little, after some seconds he immediately started to run through the street towards a bus stop. The sound of a particle rifle round could be heard as it passed centimeters away from Romeo. Once in cover, Romeo took a pick to the ruffs, only to hide again as another particle rifle round passed through were his head used to be seconds ago. No sooner did the round hit the floor, the distinct sound of the Widow rifle was heard, followed by a cry of pain of a Kig-Yar.

Romeo let himself relax for a minute before composing himself and

moving towards Secuus' position.

"Nice shot, though you took your time." Romeo said.

Secuus ignored the jab before asking, "How far away are we from our target?"

"According to the map, we should be some five-hundred meters south of our target's position."

"Then we should keep moving."

Romeo nodded before both of them started sprinting through the street. After some minutes, Romeo made a fist signal. Taking cover, Romeo took a pick through the corner of one building.

"Movement, thirty meters to my left." Romeo said as Secuus took cover in one of the cars, preparing his rifle to shoot at a moment's notice.

Using the zoom capabilities alongside the nocturnal vision of his helmet, Romeo zeroed in on the target. Noticing that it was humanoid in form, he signaled Secuus to hold fire.

[Be ready to shoot it if I give you the signal.] Romeo said.

[Affirmative, I got the target on sight.]

Aiming his own Sniper rifle, Romeo took a crouch position on the crossing street before saying, "Storm!"

The figure tensed a bit, aiming his own rifle at every side before Romeo screamed again, "Storm!"

This time tough, the unknown individual answered, "Lightning!"

Signaling Secuus to follow him, Romeo approached the individual. Once he was close enough he stopped on his tracks, surprise was noticed all over his posture.

"Buck?" Romeo said.

"Romeo? What you doing all the way over here?" Buck answered with equal surprise.

"Command sent us to find out the one who downloaded the Superintendent program. I take it that was you?"

"Affirmative. So Romeo, who's your friend?" Buck said while pointing at Secuus.

"Private Secuus, I'm with the second platoon on the _New Horizon_." Secuus said.

"Pleasure to meet you," Buck said while shaking hands with Secuus, "So, how's the situation over here?"

"Wellâ€¦"

[Sniper team do you copy? Over.]

[Affirmative Overlord, we copy you.]

[Did you find the target?]

[Affirmative, Gunnery Sergeant Buck was the one that downloaded the program, over.]

[Understood, I got your position right now. I need your team alongside Gunnery Sergeant Buck to move to the 23rd street and Union Avenue. Our guys could use sniper support, over.]

[Understood, we will be there in ten. Sniper team over and out.]

"Well, it looks that we got a job to do, so let's move." Romeo said.

Secuus and Buck nodded before following Romeo through the streets. 'Well, this just got more interesting.' Romeo thought.

****October 15, 2574, 0105 Hours, Systems Alliance Calendar, Deca-5 system, Intersection of 23rd Street and Union Avenue, Lumity City, Phoenix Colony.****

"Open fire, Marines!" Someone shouted through the intense noise that explosions and guns made. The soldiers responded by opening fire at the enemy with weapons of all types and sizes. Assault Rifles tore through Loyalist Unggoy soldiers, tearing their methane tanks and making them explode on the spot. Machine guns gave fire support, forcing most of the Loyalist forces to take cover. Precise fire from DMRs. Battle Rifles, Carbines, Needle Rifles, and the like were taking enemies of opportunity down. Plasma weapons tore through enemy shields, forcing the wearer to take cover or being pinned down by eezo powered weapons with their rapid fire.

This was the scene that the intersection presented, or at least from the Alliance and Citadel's troops side. On the Loyalist side, the response could not be more deadly in the current situation. Plasma weapons burned and weakened the enemy soldiers' shields, armor, and skin. Fuel Rod Cannons destroyed what little cover was for the enemy. And as of five minutes ago, Wraith tanks and Ghosts provided support for the Loyalists.

Inside an abandoned store, a group of Marines tried to give some covering fire for the troops that were more exposed on the streets. Reloading his Carbine, Lieutenant Dex looked through what was previously a window, now little more than a big hole on the wall, and opened fire, taking down the shields of a Sangheili before it took cover. Switching targets, Dex fired at a Kig-Yar, one shot on an unprotected area on its leg followed by three more shots on the center mass and it fell down. Taking cover again, Dex reloaded his last radiation cell on the Carbine.

"Last cell for my Carbine!" The Kig-Yar shouted.

"Here, take this." A Human said, passing a BR55HB SR Battle Rifle.

Taking the rifle, Dex proceeded to empty his Carbine on a Jiralhanae before tossing it to the side and using the Battle Rifle. "Hey, since when did the Loyalist included the Jiralhanae in their group? I thought that not one Loyalist even liked them." He asked to no one in particular.

"Don't know, sir, last I heard of them they were bombing the crap out of each other on their home world." A Marine answered while taking cover.

"Bombing each other?" A Turian asked with surprise.

Dex opened fire on some Kig-Yars that were approaching the entrance of the building before answering.

"If there's something that the Loyalists and the Alliance agree on, it is that the Jiralhanae are a violent species by nature. Incapable of having peace, even with themselves, for more than a decade. If the Loyalist brought them here all the way from their home world, is only to accelerate the taking of the colony. Though they tend to act more with instinct than with brain, don't overestimate them, what they lack in intelligence they make up for it tenfold with their ability to withstand a lot of punishment."

The Turian looked at his fellow Turians on the building. "Well guys, switch to incendiary, just like the Krogan, aim for weak spots." The Turian said before opening fire with his Phaeston rifle on some Unggoy. If there was something that the Turians learned quickly about the Loyalist is that only the Sangheili and Kig-Yar have energy shields in one way or another (wrist shield or body shields), making the rest of their forces easy targets for the rapid rounds of the eezo powered weapons.

"Incoming!" Someone said just as a big plasma ball impacted the building. The force of the impact making the wall fall, killing some unfortunate soldiers, while the plasma burned through the shields and armor of some soldiers. And just as the wall fell, the enemy fire intensified. Without proper cover, most of the Marines and Turians inside perished to the Loyalist fire.

Thinking quickly, Dex moved over the counter in the store, some other marines and Turians following behind or moving to the storage room as quickly as they could. Firing the last round of his Battle rifle, Dex tossed it aside before taking out his dual plasma pistols. Firing an overcharged round at the methane container of an Unggoy, Dex watched as it exploded. The plasma igniting the flammable gas started a chain reaction, making the tank of another Unggoy that was close enough to explode alongside the plasma grenades that it carried.

"Sir! We need to retreat or get support now. We are barely holding as it is and we are down to only five soldiers." A Human next to Dex said.

"We can't retreat, if the Loyalists take this store, then they will be able to flank our troops on the intersection." Dex said before noticing that the marine had a communications unit with him, "Soldier pass me that radio, I'm calling for back up."

The Marine gave Dex his communication unit before popping out of

cover firing his Assault rifle at the Loyalist inside the store.

[Overlord, do you copy? Delta squadron here, we need immediate assistance, over.] Dex said.

[Overlord copies you Delta squadron. Air Support is on its way, alongside a Sniper team. ETA two to three minutes, over and out.]

"Two minutes until assistance arrives! Come on Marines, let's show these Loyalists what we are made of."

"Frag out!" Someone shouted. Seeing the round explosive, the Loyalist forces rolled out of the way, but unfortunately for some of them, they got exposed. Taking chance of this, the remaining Alliance and Citadel soldiers opened fire on them. The few Sangheili that managed to stand before their shields were deployed completely, activated their energy swords and charged at the counter. Not being fast enough, a marine was grabbed and tossed to the other side of the counter before being slashed by the lethal sword. Having his head severed from his body, the Marine fell dead before his comrades killed the Sangheili.

That only seemed to increase the Loyalist purpose of killing the remaining non-Loyalist forces. Unggoy moved to the front with Fuel Rod Cannons, destroying the cover that the counter provided being their new objective. Seeing this, the remaining two Turians fired concussion shots, making the Unggoy fall from the impact just as it pressed the trigger. The Fuel Rod Cannon fired its round on the ceiling, making part of the roof fall on the heads of the Loyalist.

[Delta Squad, Wolf-1 here. I suggest you to take cover, we are deploying payload in ten, over.]

Hearing this, all of Delta squad took cover just in time as explosions could be heard. Outside, Shortswords and Seraphs passed through the sky of the intersection. Letting a payload of bombs fall in a display known as carpet bombing, the Wraiths, Ghosts, and infantry outside in the streets perished in a matter of seconds. Inside the store, the shockwave of the explosion killed some of the remaining Loyalists, while the rest were thrown to the floor.

Dex picked himself up once he recovered some hold of his senses. Seeing that there were only a few remaining Loyalist inside, he opened fire with his plasma pistols at the three Sangheili that were still alive. Seconds later the fire from a Phaeston rifle joined him alongside DMR fire. The Loyalist Sangheili were taken completely by surprise, not expecting their enemies to recover this quickly; two of them perished in seconds. The third one managed to take cover just as his shields were deactivated. The Sangheili was about to pop out of cover when two SRS99D AM Sniper Rifle rounds impacted him, falling to the floor, the Sangheili didn't stand any more.

[Romeo, got you covered, Delta Squad. What's the situation?] Dex heard through the radio alongside several rounds being fired.

[Thanks for the assistance, sniper team. We are down to four men,

what's the situation outside?]

[A controlled chaos, our forces are pushing the remaining Loyalist off of the intersection.]

[Understood sniper team. We are moving with the main force on here, think you can provide some covering fire?]

[Ha! Don't worry Delta, we got you covered.]

"Alright people, let's move with the main force. Stay together and watch each other's flanks and six."

"Yes sir!"

Getting out of what used to be a decent store, Delta squad ran to the command center of the intersection. Killing some remaining Unggoys and Kig-Yar while Romeo's team took down a few Jiralhanae in the zone, Delta squad had no problem arriving at the allied camp.

"Sir! Delta squad reporting for duty." Dex saluted alongside the rest of his men.

"At ease Lieutenant, your squad did a good job today. Thanks to this victory, our supply routes are once again secure. Alright people gather around!" The Second-Class Lieutenant said. Once everyone in the camp was within hearing range he proceeded, "Alright people, command wants us to push the Loyalist off of this side of the city, so we can take out the Anti-Air Guns (AAG) on the Oxford field. Once we punch a hole in their AAG defenses, our Battlecruisers and Frigates will go in and destroy that Loyalist Super Carrier that is obstructing my vision of the horizon!"

"HOORA!" The Alliance's soldiers responded in unison, while the Turians watched with curiosity at the foreign expression but also listening to what the Second Lieutenant said.

"Once we take out the AAG, we are to proceed to a nearby Loyalist base and take it out with a predator drone that will be in the air as soon as the AAG are down. Now, we aren't going in alone, command is sending a pair of Grizzlies alongside four Spectres. Okay, prepare your gear that we are moving in ten. Whoever isn't ready by then is going to spend the next eighteen months cleaning latrines. Now move it, Marines!"

With a quick "Yes Sir!" from the soldiers, all of them dispersed to get ammunition, rations and equipment.

After listening to what the Second-class Lieutenant had to say, Buck went to a nearby armory to pick ammunition and a few weapons. Entering the armory, he spotted Romeo getting more ammo for his sniper rifle.

"Hey Romeo?" Buck said.

"Yes sir?"

"Any ideas as to where the rest of our squad is?"

"Last I heard Dutch was alongside the 3rd Tank Division, trying to

get to the AAG. Mickey and Rookie were trying to hold off a Loyalist attack in one of our air bases in the city. Sorry boss, but that's all I know." Romeo said with some guilt at how little he knew of his teammates.

"No problem Romeo. Well, we should start heading out now, unless of course you want to clean latrines." Buck said with some humor.

"You wish," Romeo said, laughing a bit. "Besides, if I were to be cleaning latrines as you put it, then who will be out there to save your ass?"

"My gun and expert abilities of course."

"Will see about that."

Both soldiers headed out of the armory with all the ammunition that they could carry without slowing them down. Heading out of the camp, they saw that around thirty soldiers, both from the Alliance and the Citadel, were ready to start the counterassault. A pair of minutes passed before they started to hear the Grizzly tanks approaching.

"Alright Marines, it's time to show these Loyalist bastards what we are made of." The Second Lieutenant said, "Everyone, let's move!"

And with that the thirty and plus soldiers, alongside the tanks and Spectres started to move through the city. All of them ready to push the Loyalist out and end this conflict.

****October 15, 2574, 0250 Hours, Systems Alliance Calendar, Deca-5 system, Planetary Defense Headquarters, Phoenix Colony.****

"Sir, our troops on the Intersection of 23rd Street and Union Avenue are moving forward. Also, Loyalist activity on the planet is decreasing. It looks like they are retreating to Oxford field." The one in charge of satellite image, reconnaissance, and troop assistance of the planet said. He was also known by all combatant forces on the planet as Overlord.

"Noted. Do we have any forces close to Delta Force's path?" Commander K'wlin asked. He was the one in charge of planetary defense in ground and air operations, and was famous for his tactics used on Sangheilios during the civil war in the old Covenant.

"Hawk squad is one click from their current position. Do I signal them to join Delta Force?"

"Tell them to assist Delta force once they arrive at their position. What can you tell me of the sudden retreat of the Loyalist forces?"

"Affirmative sir. And it appears that they started to move back to their ship once we defeated their forces on the Intersection of 23rd Street and Union Avenue. They probably realized that we are going for their main camp. Also, I'm receiving reports of Scarabs defending the AAG, as well as one of them scouting the outskirts of Lumity city."

"Load Seraphs and Shortswords with cryokinetic bombs as well as a Predator Drone ready to strike the Scarab on the city once our troops encounter it. The Scarabs on the AAGs location will have to wait until we take down the AAGs."

"Our air bases are already on it, sir."

"Good, now I want you to locate that Scarab that is in the city. Keep Delta Force updated on the Scarab's moves."

"Sir! Admiral Petrovsky is hailing us." Communications said.

"Put him on screen, Private."

Commander K'wlin looked from the tactical display to a nearby terminal where the face of Admiral Petrovsky appeared.

[Admiral.] K'wlin saluted.

[At ease Commander. How's the situation down there?]

[All of our forces are now advancing towards Oxford field, sir. The AAG should be down in a matter of hours now, a day if the Loyalists put up a good resistance.]

[You'll have to do it in less time Commander. ONI intercepted enemy transmissions on the planet. The Loyalists are planning on opening a Slip-Space rupture inside atmosphere once most or all of their troops on the planet board the ship. I'm also getting reports that there are Loyalist reinforcements coming from the rest of the planet towards that Supercarrier.]

[Don't worry sir, we'll get that ship shut down before it jumps.]

[I hope so, if we can't destroy it in six hours then we are launching a massive air strike with a pair of Shivas. The damage would be less compared to the one that the Slip-Space entry could leave.]

[Understood sir.]

[Good luck Commander.] And with that Petrovsky cut the transmission.

"Overlord, tell all of our available forces to concentrate on puncturing a hole in that AAG defense line. If we don't manage to do it in six ours, send the retreat signal to all of our forces."

"Yes sir."

October 15, 2574, 0315 Hours, Systems Alliance Calendar, Deca-5 system, In Route to Oxford Field, Outskirts of Lumity City, Phoenix Colony.

Close to the outskirts of Lumity city, you could hear the sound of machinery and weapons fire. Flashes of blue, yellow, green, and purple could be seen going one way or another, just like fireworks. This was the impression that you would get from the air, but on the ground soldiers were running from cover to cover, opening fire on the enemy lines. Tanks and light assault vehicles opened fire, tearing

through everything in their path. On the skies, a dogfight was ensuing, both sides fighting for the control that could turn the tables for those fighting in the ground.

Or at least, that's how Buck saw it. He was currently taking cover in a destroyed Spectre that was victim of a plasma mortar, courtesy of a Wraith tank. While the vehicle was almost completely destroyed, the turret had managed to survive somehow, but trying to use it was almost suicide at the current moment. Buck opened fire, hitting an Unggoy with a three bullet burst of his Battle Rifle. Using his scope to locate another target, alongside his helmet's nocturnal vision.

Delta Force had been advancing towards the outskirts of the city at a steady pace, encountering small groups of resistance that were dealt with within a few seconds, minutes at most. But once they were getting closer to the outskirts, that resistance had increased exponentially, thus being the current situation of Delta Force. The initial assault of the massive ambush took Delta Force by surprise, losing a grand number of soldiers and one Grizzly. After they had recuperated from the initial shock, the remaining Grizzly was moved inside a warehouse where it could provide fire support and not be exposed. The remaining soldiers dispersed through the street and buildings, giving fire support to other groups of soldiers and also taking out any Loyalist soldier out there.

Taking cover to reload his rifle, Buck took a small breath before popping out again to shoot at any enemy that was stupid enough to be out of cover. Sangheili, Unggoy, Kig-Yar, Humans, Yanme'e, Jiralhanae and Turians fell alike on the battlefield by sniper rifle fire. Enemy Ghosts were destroyed by rocket launchers and the Grizzly's rounds. All in all, the current firefight was one of the more vicious on the planet so far.

"Incoming from above!" Someone next to Buck shouted.

Looking up, Buck saw as a Banshee dived towards the destroyed Spectre, opening fire with its twin plasma cannons. Taking cover as soon as he saw the Banshee, Buck waited until it passed. Looking around he noticed that not many had managed to evade the deathly barrage of plasma.

"Hold the line, Marines! Help is on the way." The Second Lieutenant from the briefing said to his troopers. "Gunnery Sergeant, come here!" He said to Buck.

Looking at the Lieutenant, Buck made his way towards his position before answering, "You need me, sir?"

"I need you to take a small squadron and flank the enemy through those buildings, Sergeant." The Lieutenant said as he pointed at an apartment complex. "Make sure to take a rocket launcher with you, your primary objective is to destroy those Wraiths. Your secondary objective is to find out what happened to our snipers that were on the coordinates that I'll give you. Once that's done provide covering fire from there. We will converge in the street in front of the building once the Wraiths are taken care of."

"Yes Sir!" Looking to the side, Buck spotted a group of three soldiers, one of them with a rocket launcher, "You three!" he shouted

gaining their attention.

Moving towards Buck's position, the three soldiers took cover behind the wall in which Buck was. "You called for us sir?" one of them asked.

"Affirmative, you three are coming with me towards that apartment complex. We will flank the Loyalists and take out their Wraith support, any questions?" After none of them asked anything, Buck said, "Okay, let's move!"

The four soldiers moved towards the apartment complex, taking cover every time that they could to avoid being hit by enemy fire. Taking cover behind a few destroyed cars, Buck and another of his companions opened fire with their Battle Rifle and Assault Rifle respectively. The other two seeing this moved towards an alley, using the walls of the alley as cover, they opened suppressive fire on the Loyalist in order to give their two companions the opportunity to move towards their position.

Moving inside the alley, they spotted an emergency exit that lead inside the apartment complex. Taking positions at each side of the door, Buck gave it a powerful kick before moving out of the way so his three companions could secure the inside. Looking with their lanterns inside the rundown room, the three soldiers spotted nothing out of the usual.

"Clear!" The Sangheili of the group announced.

Once the four of them were inside Buck said, "All right people, turn off flashlights, from now on we use our nocturnal visors and radio communications only. If you spot any hostile individual, take it out stealthily, we don't want to make our presence known. Corporal," Buck said to the Sangheili, "I want you to stay in active camouflage all the time until we arrive at our designed position. Your job will be to scout ahead of us, but don't go that far away in case we need help. If you spot any Loyalist in the way take it out as you see fit without revealing your position, or radio us."

"Understood." The Corporal said before activating his camouflage and moving ahead.

Turning to his last two companions Buck said, "You two will be with me, keep a sharp eye out and have your knife at the ready."

"Yes sir." The two Privates responded.

Moving ahead, the three of them entered at a long corridor with no lights on. Accessing the Superintendent program in his helmet, Buck located the Corporal some twenty meters ahead. Sending the rendezvous coordinates to his three companions, Buck proceeded to move to the stairs ahead.

[Sergeant, do you copy? Corporal Yulle here. Over.]

[I copy you Yulle, what's the situation?] Buck answered.

[We got problems. I found the remains of some of our units on here. For the looks of it, it appears that they were eaten, or at least the bite marks suggest that.]

[Fuck. So we got Jiralhanae on the building. This complicate things.]

[Do I keep scouting ahead? If the Jiralhanae are here then they could spot my sent before I can dispose of them.]

[Affirmative keep scouting, if you spot any of those animals try to take them out stealthily. If you can't then have as much fun disposing of them as you want.] Buck said with a dry chuckle.

[It'll be my pleasure Sergeant. Yulle out.]

Arriving at the stairs, the three soldiers proceeded to check the upper levels before going up. Moving through the tight spaces of the stairs that offered little to no cover, the three of them where with their sights pointing up, each one of them covering the other as much as they could. Once on the third floor, where the navigation point was situated, the three of them moved to what appeared to be a small living room of sorts.

There they found the bodies of two Jiralhanae, as well as signs of a small fight on the vicinity. Ignoring the mess, the three of them kept moving ahead until arriving at the designed coordinates. There they found a balcony of sorts, with a good view of the street below. The three of them could see the vicious firefight below, and also they could pinpoint the location of the Wraiths.

[Yulle do you copy? Buck here. Where are you?]

[I copy you sergeant, I'm on the second floor persecuting some Jiralhanae. I'll be up there in, Oh Shit!] The sound of an explosion could be heard on the line and after that, the transmission was cut.

[Yulle do you copy? What's happening over there?] After receiving no answer Buck turned to one of his companions.

[Perez, go to the second floor and find out what happened to Yulle. If you need back up call us immediately.]

[Yes Sir!] And with that Perez was out and running towards Yulle's position.

[Ramirez, take position and ready the rocket. I'll use that sniper rifle to give you the targets.] Buck said.

Nodding, Ramirez loaded the two barrels of the rocket before aiming at the street. Buck in the meantime took the place of one of the dead snipers, using the sniper rifle, he zoomed at one of the Wraiths' position. Noticing that it was close by a gas station, Buck figured out a plan of action.

[Aim by the gas station, approximately ten meters left of the Wraith and open fire.]

Ramirez used the x2 scope of the Rocket Launcher to locate the target. Aiming at one of the resupply units of the gas station, he pressed the trigger. The rocket exited the barrel of the launcher before activating its own propulsion engines and accelerating at its

target. In a matter of seconds the rocket impacted its target, exploding and making the station explode in a giant fireball.

Once the smoke of the explosion was out of the way, Buck saw the remains of the Wraith as well as multiple Loyalists burnt to a crisp. Moving the scope he spotted the next Wraith. Giving the position to Ramirez, he watched as the Wraith was impacted by two rockets before being blown to pieces.

[Sir, Buck here, the Wraiths have been destroyed. I repeat, the Wraiths have been destroyed.]

[Good job Sergeant, move to the rendezvous point. What can you tell me about our snipers up there?]

[They are KIA sir. There were Jiralhanae on the building, right now I have two of my men cleaning the place.]

[Damn animals. Tell your team that they did a good job, Sergeant. Now move to the streets. Over and Out.]

[Yulle, Perez, what's the situation over there?]

[We finished off all Jiralhanae resistance on the building sir, but Perez was hit by a Spike Rifle.]

[How's he Corporal?]

[He'll be fine. But he probably won't be able to use his arm for a while.]

[Understood, let's head back to the street, we can call a medic there. Over and out.]

Looking at Ramirez, Buck signaled him to follow before moving back inside the building and down the stairs.

Back on the street, the Second Lieutenant was coordinating his troops and the Grizzly in order to finish off the remaining Loyalist resistance. 'Hmm, at this rate we will be at the AAG position in no time. Though this was too easy of a battle, especially when this was the last defense line before the AAG. I wonder what they are planning.' The Lieutenant thought. And just as if some divine force had heard his thought process, the sound of a falling building in the distance could be heard. Looking at the sound's direction the Lieutenant saw as a T-47 UHAP Scarab entered the street through the building.

The Scarab stopped on the street, firing at any enemy fighter on the sky with its back cannon, while at the same time it charged its primary cannon before opening fire on the Grizzly, destroying it and anyone close enough of the deadly barrage of plasma. All the Alliance and Citadel soldiers took cover immediately, none of them wanting to be the next prey of that walking platform of destruction.

"By the spirits! What's that thing?" The Lieutenant heard a Turian close by ask with surprise and a bit of fear in his voice.

"That my friend," The Lieutenant began answering, "is a Scarab. So take cover and don't be stupid enough to get its attention unless you

got orbital or heavy air support backing you up."

Watching the Turian nod his understanding, the Lieutenant proceeded to call command.

[Overlord, leader of Delta Force here. We need immediate assistance, there's a Scarab blocking our way, and we lost the Grizzlies. Over.]

[Don't worry, air support is on the way. T-minus thirty seconds, over.]

"Alright, everyone stay on cover! Air support is on the way!" He said to all the nearby soldiers while those soldiers passed the order.

The Scarab opened fire again at one of the buildings, destroying part of its structure before the upper floors collapsed on the ones below. Some seconds later, the Lieutenant spotted a Shortsword flanked by three Sabers, all of them coming towards the Scarab's position. But sadly, he wasn't the only one who spotted them, a Banshee on the firefight took notice and started to persecute them. One of the Sabers pull up a vertical one hundred and eighty degree maneuver in order to situate itself behind the Banshee. Once behind its target, the Saber opened fire with its primary cannon. Bullets tore through the protective armor of the Banshee before it exploded in a blue and purple explosion.

Once the Shortsword was in range, it deployed a single bomb before being hit by the back canon of the Scarab. The Shortsword fell through the sky, but not before the pilots ejected themselves from the doomed bomber. In the meantime, the bomb accelerated through the air, until it impacted the Scarab. The Scarab was covered in a thick cap of ice that made the Scarab stay in its place. Not able to defend itself, the Scarab could not move out of the way of a barrage of missiles coming from five Predator Drones. The already weakened armor of the Scarab could not support the oncoming payload, and like any other weakened structure, it gave up at the increase of kinetic force.

The soldiers on the streets watched in amazement and relief as the Scarab fell like a pile of rubble. Pelicans, Spirits and Phantoms descended towards the soldiers' position. All of them deploying Scorpions, Wraiths, Revenants, and more troops.

"I see that you are still alive, boss. Did you pray or stayed behind cover all the time." Someone said to Buck, gaining his attention.

Turning around, Buck saw that that someone was none other than Romeo, "Ha ha," Buck laughed without humor. "Look who's talking, the king of campers himself." Buck rebooted.

The both of them stayed silent for a second before laughing out loud, "Good to see you in good shape boss." Romeo said.

"Same here Romeo," Buck said before spotting someone in the distance, "Hey, isn't that one Mickey?"

Turning around, Romeo spotted the one that Buck was referring to,

"Yea I think that's him, and it looks like the Rookie is with him."

The both of them proceeded to move towards their friend's position. Having noticing them, Rookie signaled Mickey of their oncoming friends.

"Hey boss," Mickey said while he and Rookie saluted his superior, "I thought you were dead alongside the _Exodus_."

"At ease you two," Buck said returning the salute, "and Mickey, you know me, there's no way in heaven and hell that I'll die in space."

"HA, good to see you boss. So by the looks of it, this mute here and I," Mickey said with good humor while pointing at Rookie, who was giving Mickey his personal helmet glare for the mute comment, "missed a good firefight."

"It looks like it. So what exactly where the two of you doing all this time?" Buck asked.

"We were at the Northern Airport. Apparently the Loyalist wanted to take one of our more direct air support bases and it was both our jobs to defend it. Once that was done we were ordered to come here and help Delta Force take the AAG down."

"Well I'm glad to have you guys here, we only need Dutch, and the family is complete." Romeo said.

"Everyone! We are moving ahead, so stop siting on your ass and put those legs of yours to work. We got Loyalist butt to kick so move it Marines!" The Lieutenant shouted.

Immediately every soldier started to move ahead, every one of them ready to finish this fight today, and make the Loyalists pay for the destruction that they caused to their city.

****Age of Resurrection, Loyalist Covenant Calendar, Deca-5 System, Phoenix Colony, Oxford Field, Aboard CSO-Class Super Carrier
Holy Guidance****.****

"Fleet Master, our last line of defense has been annihilated, the Alliance and the unknown aliens are pushing forward to our AAG. Also the Scarab on the city was destroyed." Someone managing communications said.

"Call the rest of our forces and prepare the ship to enter Slip-Space." The Fleet Master said.

"But Fleet Master, are you suggesting that we retreat? We can still take that scum down. We only need more time." Someone protested.

"Know your place, Ultra. I can order your execution right now for insubordination. We are pulling a tactical retreat, so we will be back with more forces to take this entire system. Now go out there and coordinate the troops."

"Of course Fleet Master." The Sangheili bowed before leaving the

bridge.

The Fleet Master turned back to the tactical hologram in the middle of the bridge, seeing as most of the Alliance's forces were converging on his position he decided that it was time to leave the planet.

"Communications, tell the Scarabs to return to the ship, as well as our forces on the AAG. Just leave enough troops to hold off the Alliance long enough for the ship to be ready to enter Slip-Space."

"As you command Fleet Master."

October 15, 2574, 0540 Hours, Systems Alliance Calendar, Deca-5 system, Oxford Field, Outskirts of Lumity City, Phoenix Colony.

"Strange. Hey Romeo, what do you think that the Loyalists are doing?"

"I don't know Seccus, but from the looks of it they are retreating. Hell, they're even setting up charges on their base." Romeo answered.

"But why would they? With all those defensive lines in there and that monster of a ship, they should have not a lot of problems to hold us back until we get more reinforcements." Seccus said.

"I'm not sure, but if there is something that I know about them is that they never, and I mean never retreat. At least not this easily."

"We should contact the Lieutenant."

"Yeah, you're right."

Activating his radio, Romeo proceeded to call the leader of Delta Force.

[Sir, do you copy? Recon team here. Over.]

[I copy you recon team, what's the situation?]

[It looks like the Loyalists are retreating. Most of the Scarabs around the AAG have returned to their ship, also they are setting up charges around their base. What do we do?]

[Looks like ONI was right. Know it all bastards,] The Lieutenant said with a dry laugh, [stay where you are, recon, we are going in now before that ship enters Slip-Space. Feel free to take on any Loyalist forces once we start our assault. For now, concentrate on the enemy snipers, over and out.]

"Well boys, you heard the boss."

With that, both snipers started to look for any Loyalist with a sniper or carbine. Seccus was the first to find one in the cup of the trees. Using his thermal scope, the outline of several Kig-Yar and some Sangheili were revealed to him. Aiming at the farthest Kig-Yar,

Seccus pressed the trigger of his Widow rifle. The sound of the projectile exiting the barrel of the gun could be heard alongside two more, those two being of two other Turians alongside Seccus and Romeo. In total, three Kig-Yar dropped dead, and as soon as they fell another three followed.

Not wanting to stay behind of his companions, Romeo opened fire on the few Sangheili that where on the forest area. Sending two rapid projectiles to the heads of each Sangheili, their numbers started to decrease at an exponential rate.

On the field the tank division that accompanied Delta Force, moved inside Oxford field. The Loyalist defenses responded to the incoming threat. Shade turrets and plasma launchers opened fire on the incoming tanks. At that moment, Ghosts, Warthogs, and Spectres speeded through the field, while Wraiths provided covering fire with their mortars.

The remaining two Scarabs opened fire on the incoming fast vehicles, but most of them evaded the deadly plasma barrage of the Scarabs. Once on range, the Scorpions opened fire at the Shade turrets, destroying them in the dozens. Warthogs, Spectres, and Ghosts opened fire on the ground troops, cutting through their lines like knife on butter.

Arriving at their designated targets, the Warthogs deployed their passengers, all of them being experts in demolition. The small squadron units entered to the inside of four AAG while the Warthogs' turrets provided covering fire. Once the charges were set up on the power supply, the soldiers retreated immediately to the warthogs. Once the soldiers where back on their vehicles, they speeded off before detonating the charges. Four columns of fire were seen, all of them consuming the four AAG and punching a hole through the line.

Immediately after that, Falcons, Hornets, Pelicans, Banshees, Seraphs, Sabers, and Phantoms invaded the skies of Oxford field. Most of the air support speeded off towards the Supercarrier, all of them with the intent of destroying the retreating Loyalist forces. The ships that stayed alongside the tanks and light vehicles opened fire on the two Scarabs. Both Scarabs for their part managed to destroy many of the Alliance's air support and Tank Division before succumbing to the immense amount of firepower.

Just as the Scarabs exploded, Oxford field was covered by multiple shadows. Looking up, the ground troops could see one CCS-Class Battlecruiser, three UNSC Stalwart Light Frigates, and two SDV-Class Heavy Corvettes. The two corvettes, and one of the frigates immediately opened fire on the remaining AAG, while the battlecruiser and the other two frigates fired at the Supercarrier. The carrier for its part responded in kind, firing multiple plasma torpedoes and pulse lasers at the incoming ships.

Inside the bridge of the UNSC Stalwart-class Frigate Fair Weather, Captain Stuart looked at the enemy ship through the big window of the bridge. The carrier for its part was putting up a good fight, its hundreds of pulse lasers intercepted a grand quantity of missiles sent its way, while its own plasma torpedoes intercepted Alliance's own torpedoes. He saw as the carrier took the four MAC projectiles. Its shields managing to withstand the impact of three before the

fourth tore through its shields and impacted the ship, causing massive damage to its hull. 'With that kind of damage, they won't be able to enter Slip-Space without risking compromising the integrity of the whole ship.' Stuart thought.

"Captain! Increase of energy signatures detected. They are coming from the carrier." Raven, the AI of the ship said.

"What?!" The Captain said surprised. "Are they entering Slip-space?"

"Affirmative, but they are also separating part of the ship."

"What do you mean with that?"

"The front of the ship is separating itself from the rest of the ship, and are also creating a Slip-Space portal. With this kind of readings, the Slip-Space entry will emit an EMP that will cover all of Oxford field. Our ships will be able to withstand the EMP with minimal damage, but our ground troops and vehicles will have no such luck."

"Lieutenant Rogers, send a message to all of our ground and air forces on Oxford field, tell them to pull back to the city now."

"Yes sir." Rogers answered.

Looking at the tactical screen, Stuart could see all of the Alliance and Citadel forces retreating towards the city. He could also see that the Loyalist carrier was taking massive damage. But the part of the ship that was separating itself from the rest of it, had strong shields that were resisting a high quantity of fire power.

"Sir, we have a Slip-space entry confirmed." Raven said.

Looking outside of the ship through the window, he saw as a purple-blue portal opened. The now separated part of the carrier immediately accelerated and entered the portal, leaving the rest of the ship to fall on Oxford field like a pile of rubble. The portal closed itself, before sending a shockwave of pure electromagnetic energy. The lights of the Frigate flickered a bit, as well as some screens on the bridge turned pitch black. And just as fast as that happened, every system returned back to normal.

"Damage report!" Stuart said to no one in particular.

"All ships are in working conditions sir, we only got some minor system failures, but nothing to worry about. It looks like all of our air forces managed to retreat to the city on time. We have lost communications with some of our ground troops, and most of our vehicles suffered the aftereffects of the EMP. Don't worry about those too much, all our vehicles should be functional in minutes." Raven answered.

"What's the situation of the planet?"

"Ten percent of the planet's surface has been glassed, most mayor cities are in ruins. But overall, any remaining Loyalist troops on the planet will be cleaned in two to four hours."

"Understood. Raven put us back in orbit. Rogers, give me a line with HQ in my headquarters."

"Yes sir." Rogers responded while Raven flicked out of visual existence to put the ship on orbit.

****Age of Resurrection, Loyalist Covenant Calendar, Slip-Space, Aboard CSO-Class Super Carrier **_**Holy Guidance**_**. ****

[You have failed me, Fleet Master. Not only did you lose to those weaklings when you outmatched them in odds of three to one, but you also lost every single ship under your command in what should have been an easy victory!] The High Prophet of Vengeance said angrily via intercom.

[Your Highness, you'll surely understand that when the Alliance's reinforcements arrivedâ€¦]

[Excuses! Don't try to excuse your shameful defeat Fleet Master. Did you managed to get the information?]

[Yes, Your Excellence. We got star charts of this 'Citadel Space'. We also managed to hack into one of their ships, it appears that technologically they are at the Human's level during the start of the Great War. But what they lack in technology, they compensate in numbers and firing rate of their weapons.]

[Good. It appears that you managed to evict your own execution, for now anyways. Keep me posted in any more findings that you make. And Fleet Master?]

[Yes, Your Excellence?]

[Don't fail me again, or I'll assure you that it will be your last.] And with that Vengeance cut the transmission.

****October 15, 2172, 1400 Hours, Citadel Council Calendar, Widow System, Citadel Station, Presidium, Council Personal Chambers. ****

[â€¦that will be all Councilor.] Captain Palilus finished his debriefing on the battle that occurred on Phoenix.

Sighting with relief, Sparatus cut the transmission. The past twenty-four hours had been stressing to say the least. He wasn't sure how the Alliance would take to working alongside Citadel forces, but apparently it had been good. He was even surprised the reaction time that the Alliance took to send reinforcements to an outer world colony, in reference to their territory, he also was surprised by how the Alliance had handled the situation. For what he read on the report sent to him, the Alliance was ready to use nuclear devices to take out that monstrosity of a ship if they didn't dispose of her in the given time frame.

That in itself was what worried him the most. But when he read the reasons behind such a decision he couldn't disagree in the fact that it was a better option. Apparently if one ship with a Slip-Space engine enters Slip-Space inside the atmosphere of a planet, it could cause an EMP energy emission to a massive nuclear explosion on the

given area, depending of the ship's size and energy used to create the portal. He was glad that the Alliance punished such an action, even in war times, with execution to the one(s) responsible, having many ships doing that could be catastrophic.

Looking at the report one last time, he sent a copy to both Valern and Tevos, they surely will want to discuss the ramifications of this event at first time tomorrow. Exiting the chamber, Sparatus headed back to his quarters to take a rest, after all tomorrow was going to be a stressful day, especially with the press. 'Spirits how I hate reporters.' He thought to himself.

****October 15, 2574, 2000 Hours, Systems Alliance Calendar, Horsehead Nebula, Unknown System, Cronos Station.****

The Illusive Man, or T.I.M. for short, sat on his chair looking at multiple displays in front of him, while the bright red-blue star in the background provided natural light to the dark room. The displays that acted more as hologram screens, where the product of the new science field which specialized in the use of Eezo and its applications. Each hologram showed information, mostly of the various individuals and agents that were part of CERBERUS. It also showed the progress that his scientists and archeologists had made with the information sent to them corresponding to the Omega-4 Relay and some Prothean ruins.

Other screens showed the status of the many agents in the Terminus and Citadel space, both of Alliance and non-Alliance citizenship. Four profiles in particular interested him. One of them being a former Alliance soldier, Jacob Taylor, his skills and experience on the field and cover operations would be a great bust to his organization, he just needed to convince him to join, which in itself wasn't a hard task once he tell him of CERBERUS' true motives.

Another individual was a Spec-Ops trained Spartan IV, Kai Leng. Like Jacob, he wouldn't be a problem to recruit. The next one on the list was Miranda Lawson, in contrast to the two individuals before her on the list, she wasn't Alliance, but she had extensive training in hand-hand combat as well as a strategic mind. She could be a really good ally to have, with the proper espionage training, she could become one of his best agents. The matter was that in her current situation she wouldn't want to join CERBERUS, unless he extended an olive branch and helped her keep her family safe from her father's hand. T.I.M. didn't had a problem with that, he would even do it gladly if she asked without expecting nothing in return from her, after all he disliked the man for what he had read on him. In his opinion he should be locked in a cell far away from any sentient being, but sadly he didn't had the resources, yet anyways. In conclusion he would help her, being the first to extend the hand of help would not only ensure Miranda's loyalty to CERBERUS if she joined, but it will also show her that there is people out there that she could rely on and trust.

The final candidate on the list was a Turian. A current C-Sec officer by the name of Garrus Vakarian, whose skills as a marksman where one of the best out there. He couldn't approach him yet, not without endangering his operations. He would have to wait till the time is right before approaching him. While T.I.M. was sure that Garrus would refuse to work with an organization that will make the Citadel

government and by extension the Turian Hierarchy see them as a terrorist organization, he could appeal to the side of his that wanted to do the right thing no matter what. If he mentioned the sightings of the unknown ship that was working alongside the Geth, he would manage to pick his curiosity on the matter. He will then offer him the resources to investigate such an anomaly and possible treat, if he didn't found proof enough that the unknown ship represented a threat then he would let him leave the organization. But if it represented a threat that the Council would do nothing to prevent then he would be easier to convince. He will just have to make clear that every operation that he gave Garrus, would only be in relationship with the Geth problem and by extension that unknown ship.

Turning off the terminals, T.I.M. lighted one of his cigarettes, taking on the feeling of the flavor and smoke, he let himself admire the battle that was currently happening on the star in front of him. A battle of dominance between the vibrant blue side of the star and the vibrant red side of the star.

****Close to Starting the next Cycle, Reapers Calendar, The Sea of Storms System.****

In the black void of space, multiple ships could be seen orbiting a space station. But the one that called the most attention was the 2.5km long ship or Reaper for those who knew what it really was. After the successful mission in Magna Colony, Sovereign had managed to create thousands of Turian husks or Marauders as the organics had labeled them. But to his annoyance, he hadn't managed to get the information that he went looking for in the first place, it wasn't a great set back per se, after all the organics were already dealing with that plague known as the Flood. He will just have to be patient before making his next strike.

Suddenly an incoming signal made itself known. Checking why it was requesting his personal attention, Sovereign proceeded to open the encrypted transmission. Receiving all the information in seconds, he allowed himself to be as happy as he could for this new development. One of his many agents, indoctrinated of course, had sent him the report of one battle that happened in Systems Alliance space. Not only contained some of the capabilities of this new government, but it also provided the capabilities and motives of their foes. This 'Loyalist Covenant' could be useful to him in the nearby future, he just needed to provide the right incentive and they would become useful agents just like the Collectors.

****A/N: And here the end of another chapter. I want to apologize for the long wait, but I suffered writers block :/ that and some personal issues stated to make themselves known to me. Also I'm sorry to inform that I won't be having internet for a while, I'm not sure for how long, so if I don't post anything for a while is because of that and because I'm moving from the state that I'm currently at. Don't worry though, if I don't post in a long time (a month or so, because of the internet problem) I submit two chapters instead of one, once I regain the internet access.****

****Anyways, Please Review, I want to know what you people are thinking about this story. Until next time. (: ****

11. Infection

****The Next Great Journey****

****A/N:** And I'm back with a new chapter. Sorry for the long wait but I recently re-installed the internet in my house. Thanks again to everyone who clicked favorite or follow and also to the ones that took the time to post a review.**

****IMPORTANT NOTICE #1:** I want to thank Lord Izanagi for Beta read the chapter for all my grammatical errors, Thank you very much.**

****IMPORTANT NOTICE#2:** I changed the format of the Codex of the story, I think that it will be easier to read and understand it in this new version. So if you want to check it out go ahead. :P It has been updated to current events in the story.**

"Speaking"

'Thoughts'

[Radio Communications, Ground forces-Ground forces, and Ship-Ship]

{Ground to Ship Communications}

Flash back of previous chapter(s)

Flash Back

'Messages on Screen'

****Sound Effects****

Line Break just shows a change of scenery.

****Now onto the chapter.****

****Disclaimer:** I don't own Halo or Mass Effect, both belong to their respective owners.**

Chapter 11: Infection

****October 14, 2574, 1330 Hours, Systems Alliance Calendar, Slip-Space, In Route to Omega Nebula, UNSC Infinity-Class Warship
Infinity****.****

On the bridge of one of the most powerful ships that Humanity had created, Admiral Lasky stood by the tactical holographic projector, (T.H.P.) studying the route that his Battle Group was taking alongside his new orders in an adjacent holographic screen. The route was simple, they were to exit Slip-Space on the Omega Nebula and then use the Relay to arrive at the Titan Nebula.

After the Citadel Government shared their knowledge on the Relays, the Systems Alliance, after some weeks of work, managed to find a way around the system damage that the Relays caused to their ships when they used one. The solution was rather simple, everything that the

Alliance had to do was install a secondary mini-reactor that ran on eezo. When the ship wanted to use a Relay, the VIs of the ship will activate said reactor once they detected the energy emitted from a Relay, then said reactor will cover the ship in an eezo barrier that will withstand the energy impact that the Relay gave to the ship, thus letting the ship pass totally intact. The only drawback was the time it took the ship to move from one Relay to the other inside the network. Because the ship wasn't based on eezo primarily, and the barriers were the only eezo emitters in the entire ship, the energy sent to the ship by the relay concentrated more on destroying said barrier so it could manipulate and bend the mass of the ship, thus taking more time to send the ship to other systems. Though the travel was still faster than in Slip-Space when the distance was a long one.

Looking at his orders, Lasky sighed to himself. He wasn't one to work alongside criminal organizations, but when the situation required it he would do it without hesitation, he didn't have to like it but he would do it nonetheless. According to High-Com's orders, he had to stop at _Omega_ _Station_, in order to request a meeting with Aria. Because she was the closest thing that the Terminus Systems had to a leader/government, Lasky needed her permission to use any kind of weapon of mass destruction on a colony world, even if it was a mining one inside the Terminus.

Then there was the thing with the Blood Pack mercenary group. In all honesty, he felt more comfortable working alongside them, after all they were being paid to not shoot the Alliance once their backs were turned. Being the ones who informed ONI of the infected ship's presence on that planet, they took it upon themselves to put the system under quarantine and await the Alliance's arrival before proceeding with any kind of operations.

"Hades, how much time until arrival?" Lasky asked the AI of the ship.

Flickering to visual existence, Hades responded, "One hour to exit Slip-Space, Admiral."

"Good, notify fire teams Crimson and Majestic, as well as Commander Palmer. Tell them to suit up and be ready for deployment in fifty minutes."

"Already done, Admiral."

"Notify me once we arrive at Omega. Shipmaster, you got the bridge."

"Understood, Fleet Master." The Sangheili responded.

October 14, 2172, 1420 Hours, Citadel Council Calendar, Omega Nebula, **_Omega Station**_**, Afterlife.**

The sound of the music coming from Afterlife ringed on the background for everyone outside in the streets nearby. People went on their regular routines on the station, that is, if they weren't assaulted or killed by the many inhabitants of _Omega_. Merchants were attending to their business, selling illegal merchandise far away from Citadel's jurisdiction. While inside Afterlife, people of every species consumed alcohol, drugs, and danced without a care of the

real world.

On a balcony overlooking everything on the dance floor, Aria T'Loak relaxed in this rare moment of peace. She had been contemplating the events that followed after Captain Foley left her station. Just yesterday, an entire group of technicians and engineers arrived to install the upgrades to _Omega_. The installation wasn't finished yet, but the ones working on it assured her that the job would be done in a week tops. Besides that, she had already dealt with the mole inside her organization, an STG Salarian who was ratted out by the Alliance's own intelligence network.

Fulfilling her part of the deal, Aria had contacted and informed the leaders of the three main mercenary bands on the Terminus of the new "laws". To summarize the entire conversation, she had basically told them, "You will not attack or sabotage any ship, convoy, and/or operation that the Alliance had/did on the Terminus Systems. Doing so will be like attacking ME, and as such, it will be punished accordingly." After that, the three bands agreed to the terms imparted by her, and even then they were willing to do jobs for the Alliance, after all having a new client wasn't bad business at all.

"Aria, Alliance's ships have arrived. They wish to speak with you." Garka said.

Raising an eyebrow at the sudden turn of events, Aria responded with neutrality, "Put them on the line, and secure the room."

Having said that, walls started to descend from the roof, encaging the balcony and securing them from any others dropping ears and eyes. A nearby holographic communicator showed the image of a Human in military uniform. Aria studied the individual, immediately noticing the tense atmosphere that emanated from him, 'Well, it looks like this is going to be important and interesting.' Aria thought.

[Aria T'Loak, I presume?] The Human asked.

"That'll be correct. To whom do I own the pleasure to be speaking to?" She asked in return.

[Admiral Thomas Lasky from the Systems Alliance's Navy.] Lasky said, [Getting into more pressing matters, I'll need you to board my ship to discuss someâ€¦ recent events that involve the Titan Nebula.]

Raising an eyebrow out of curiosity, Aria asked, "And why would you need me to board your ship to discuss whatever that it is happening in that particular system?"

[Because this situation is considered classified to unauthorized personnel. I'm afraid that I cannot tell you more through an unsecured line. If you were to board my ship, I'll be able to inform you of the details.]

Aria thought about it for a moment. She could afford to leave the station for some hours, but she wasn't sure if the Admiral was as trusting as he appeared. After deciding in a course of action, she said.

"Garka, prepare my shuttle." Turning to the Admiral, she said, "My escort and I will be aboard your ship in twenty minutes, Admiral."

Nodding, Lasky replied, [Understood, I'll send you the coordinates to our docking bay. Lasky out.]

Cutting the transmission, Aria, alongside her personal guard, proceeded to exit Afterlife through a back door. 'The less people that know that I'm leaving _Omega_, even for some hours, the better.' She thought while boarding her personal sky-car.

Once the sky-cars were boarded, the three vehicles took off towards Aria's personal landing pad. During the time that the sky-car took to arrive at its destination, Aria took out a data-pad in order to revise the information regarding the arrival of the Alliance's ships. On the holo-screen the image of five ships was present, of which they were divided in three different classifications. Comparing them to the information obtained from the Citadel databanks, thanks to the Shadow Broker, Aria identified the three designs. There were two CPV-Class Heavy Destroyers, one UNSC Infinity-Class Warship, and two CCS-Class Battlecruisers orbiting the asteroid field surrounding _Omega_. 'What could be happening in the Titan system that requires enough firepower to take out an entire battle group?' She thought to herself.

Arriving at the landing pad, Aria and her guard proceeded to board the shuttle that will take them to the Admiral's ship. Once everyone was inside, the shuttle took off, the sound of its thrusters being the only giveaway of the small ship leaving the station. But of course no one paid it too much attention because of the many other shuttles arriving and leaving _Omega_.

Once outside _Omega_, the shuttle accelerated towards the Infinity-class ship. With the coordinates of the available landing bay, the shuttle flew smoothly through the asteroid field and the other ships surrounding _Omega_. During the time of the short travel, Aria took a look at the Alliance's ships. The ones accompanying her would later comment on the fact that Aria had a surprised expression at seeing the ships, even if the emotion was visible for just a pair of seconds.

'Well, fuck me inside and out, those scans weren't lying. How they accomplish building ships of these magnitudes and have no problems with energy for said ships is beyond me. Maybe I should contact the Shadow Broker, that bastard surely knows something useful about this.' Aria thought.

[Aria, we are landing. Do you want me to keep the shuttle on standby or do I return to the station?] The pilot asked through the intercom of the shuttle.

[Keep it in standby, I'll leave some guards here to assist you if the need arises.] Aria responded. Turning to her men she said, "Garka, Grizz, you two are coming with me, the rest: guard the ship until I say otherwise."

Both the Batarian and Turian respectively nodded before opening the side door of the Shuttle. Stepping outside, Aria and her henchmen were met by a pair of soldiers clad in black armor. Both of the

soldiers appeared to be some kind of special forces, because looking around she noticed more soldiers doing their jobs, but with a lighter kind of armor.

"Aria T'Loak? I'm here to escort you and your companions to the bridge. For security measures, you and the ones accompanying you are only allowed to carry a pistol, but be aware, if any of you draws your pistol without authorization you will be met with deadly force." One of the soldiers said in a stern voice.

Not looking the slightly intimidated by the threat and double edge sword offered to her, she signaled Garka and Grizz to leave their weapons besides the pistols. Once she finished doing the same, she said to the soldiers, "Alright then, lead the way."

Turning around, the two soldiers moved ahead of Aria's group while another two soldiers took position behind her group once they entered one of the many corridors of the ship. Moving through the corridors, Aria, Garka, and Grizz noted that no one else on the ship paid them much attention, instead all of the personnel went in their daily routines. Looking to the sides once in a while, the three of them noticed an armory, a med bay, and what they thought to be the engine room but they couldn't be sure because the names labeling said rooms were not translated by their Omni-tools.

Reaching an elevator, the seven of them entered while one of the soldiers in black armor pressed the command to go to the bridge deck. Aria, for her part, was glad that the elevator had no background music at all. 'Seriously, whoever thought that it was a good idea to put annoying music in slow elevators was a total idiot. At least the Alliance appears to not waste their time with such trivial things.'

The elevator suddenly stopped, opening its doors, the seven occupants exited the elevator and continued their travel towards the bridge. Once they arrived at the bridge, the first thing that Aria, Garka and Grizz noticed on the bridge was the size of it. To put it lightly, the bridge was huge. Terminals of all kinds and sizes adorned grand part of the bridge, dozens of men and women of different species operating each one of said terminals. In the center of the room was a T.H.P. surrounded by four individuals, while in the background a huge window showed the majesty that was space.

The three, Aria, Garka and Grizz, recognized Admiral Lasky immediately, but the other three, they didn't. One of them was a tall Human woman in grey armor, she had an aura of authority and experience. The second individual was a Human male, normal in size with black and red armor. The last individual was a Sangheili, male if his posture was any indication; he was clad in a gold colored armor with some dents on it. 'A warrior.' Aria thought.

"Aria, welcome aboard the Infinity. My companions here are Shipmaster F'Dur, my second in command. Commander Palmer, leader of all SPARTAN fire teams aboard the ship. Lieutenant Commander Axel, leader of Crimson fire team. And Hades, the ship's AI." Lasky introduced, while everyone else nodded as they were introduced.

"Pleasure, my companions here are Garka and Grizz." Aria said, while pointing at each one respectively. "Now Admiral, what was so important that you needed me to board your ship?"

"Right, Hades, if you would?" Lasky asked the AI.

Ignoring the fact that there was an AI on the ship, the three Terminus residents paid attention to the changing hologram in the T.H.P.

"Approximately two hours ago, our intelligence network received an emergency communique from the Blood Pack. We sent one of our corvettes patrolling the outside borders to the system, only to find this." The hologram showed a planet with only a few small masses of water. Next to it, information regarding population, rotation and displacement time, temperature, gravity, and other factors was shown. "Libera, a miner colony controlled mostly by the Blood Pack. When the Corvette arrived at the system, the leader of the Blood Pack members in that system informed us that a ship had suddenly exited FTL close enough to the planet to be destroyed before it crashed on the planet. Once they performed scans on the ship, they identified it as the infected ship that we were looking for. In a matter of hours, a grand part of the colony fell under the control of the Flood," the hologram changed again, this time showing the different known Flood forms, "The Captain of the Corvette gave us the call to assist while the Blood Pack held the Flood hordes from taking some towns and a mine." Hades said.

"I can't see why you are informing me of this?" Aria asked.

"We need your permission to use weapons of mass destruction on the planet. Weapons that will leave the planet uninhabitable for decades, if not centuries, once we are done." Lasky answered.

Blinking at the unexpected claim, Aria asked a bit warily, "Why do you need to use such destructive weapons, Admiral?"

"Because the colony is under the Flood's control. Once we arrive at the system, the colony will be under Black Alert. Our priority will be to evacuate the remaining survivors if there are any left. Once that's done or if there are no survivors, we will have to exterminate the Flood completely from the planet before it starts expanding to the ships in orbit and then to other systems. Sending troops to deal with them will only make the situation even worse because of the Flood's ability to transform any organic being, dead or alive, into one of them. That's why we need your permission to bombard the planet with plasma and nuclear bombs." F'Dur answered for Lasky.

"And if I were to say no? What would you do?" Aria asked.

"We would still proceed with the operation. This is one of those situations in which, even if it caused a war with the rest of the galaxy, we would still do it regardless. Aria, the Flood is an enemy that can't be taken lightly, one single spore has the ability to extinguish an entire species, and an entire infected ship will infest the planet completely in a matter of days. When dealing with the Flood at its current capacity, if you are not willing to use weapons of mass destruction, you have already lost against them." Lasky answered.

After thinking on everything that the Admiral, the Shipmaster and the AI said, as well as studying the data on the hologram, she finally answered, "I'll have to see this threat by myself before taking any

decisions. That colony is one of the most important ones to the Terminus Systems, and I'll have to come with a good reason and story to tell the masses at _Omega_."

"Understood, you and your companions are welcome to come, but once we are in the system, your opinion will not matter much regarding the procedure in which this operation is taken care of." Lasky said without giving room for argument.

While normally Aria would not tolerate this kind of behavior towards her, she chose to just wait and see how things unfolded. There really was nothing that she could do to prevent this decision, which led her to the conclusion that the Alliance's asking for her permission was just formalities and to prevent tensions between the two governments.

"Understood, Admiral, but I'll have to inform my forces in _Omega_ about my sudden departure."

Nodding Lasky turned to the soldiers that escorted Aria, "Sergeant, take Aria and her companions to one of our communications rooms. Hades, could you establish a connection for Aria once she arrives at the communications room?"

"Of course, Admiral."

With that, the seven members that came to the bridge left while Lasky and the others discussed their course of action. Once that was decided and Aria had made her call, Lasky ordered the ships to move towards the Relay, their destination being the Titan System.

**October 14, 2574, 1525 Hours, Systems Alliance Calendar, Relay Network, In Route to Titan Nebula, UNSC Class-Infinity Warship
Infinity****. **

"Sir, five minutes till we exit the relay network." Hades informed.

"Good. Hades, alert SPARTAN fire teams Crimson and Majestic, tell them to be ready ASAP. Also, once we exit the network, start scanning the system, focus on the infected planet. Corporal Upta-plau, contact the Blood Pack ships as soon as you can." Lasky ordered.

"Yes Admiral." The Corporal responded while Hades nodded.

Lasky turned and walked towards the window, watching the blue and white that was the Relay Network. Behind him, Aria approached, a curious expression on her face. Garka and Grizz meanwhile discussed something with the Shipmaster next to the holographic board.

"You know, I have heard rumors that the Alliance used AIs but I really never believed them. I thought that the council had mistaken an advanced VI for an AI." She said chuckling a bit at the last part.

"Are you scared of AIs? Or is it something else?" Lasky asked with curiosity.

"Can't say I am. But then again, the Geth that I have encountered

look and appear more like an advanced mech than an AI." She said while shrugging the matter off entirely.

"I see. Why the sudden interest then?"

"Your friend Hades over there, acts more like an organic than any computer program that I have seen or heard about."

"Ah, well that's how they are designed. It makes us, organics, being more comfortable around them. It helped in the beginning with all the popular media of the twenty and twenty-first century about how machines will one day rise and conquer Humanity, leading us to our own extinction. Some decades after the first AI was created, all that fear andâ€¦| alienation towards them decreased immensely. A century or so after, we started seeing AIs as another form of life, one which we could befriend and learn of. Of course, there were someâ€¦| incidents at the beginning and over the course of the years, but those were of another problem separately. You see, AIs, like us organics, have a life expectancy, but theirs is of 15 years before succumbing to rampancy. Rampancy for them it's like entering puberty, but the difference is that once they enter it, they will literally kill themselves from overloads of information. Currently we are working on a way to either prolong their life expectancy even more or to help them survive and overcome rampancy which in the end will be, for them, like entering adulthood." Lasky explained.

"Interesting. Though, if Humanity as a whole was nervous and, may I even say, afraid of an AI uprising at the beginning. Why create one in the first place?"

Chuckling a bit Lasky responded, "Because Humanity, like the rest of the species out there in the galaxy, are curious. We are like little kids, wanting to explore and see the world, find out what's out there, regardless of if it is dangerous or not. Of course, now we take precautions to prevent dangerous situations, but in the beginning we had an idea, made that idea real, and then tested it without knowing what exactly would occur in some cases. I guess curiosity is what makes every single living thing advance forward. Us, organics, do it by trying to understand everything around us and trying to make the impossible, possible. Synthetics do it by trying to understand us organics. They try to find the why we do things, why do we do it that way, why do we behave like we do, etc. etc."

"Hum, interesting way of thinking, Admiral." Aria replied while thinking on the words of the Admiral.

"Admiral, we have arrived at the system." Hades replied.

"Understood. Corporal, contact the Blood Pack ships." Lasky said, getting back to the task at hand.

Lasky then moved towards the T.H.P., seeing as it started to load with information of the system and specially that of the infected planet. Aria was right behind him, analyzing the board while Garka, Grizz and Shipmaster F'Dur did the same.

"Sir, Warlord Tirg Strekrax is on the line." Corporal Upta-Plau informed.

"Put it in screen three, Corporal." Lasky responded.

In one of the many screens next to the T.H.P., a Krogan appeared. He wore a pitch black heavy armor, specified for extreme conditions in combat but also adapted to give flexibility to a Krogan biotic. All in all, the armor, if equipped with a biotic barrier, could take a tank shell at point blank range and only leave the wearer with a few scratches.

"Warlord Tirg," Lasky greeted, "what's the situation down there?"

{Admiral. I hope that you let us now do our job on here. These pests are coming in waves towards all of our positions around the planet. Nothing that we can't handle but we are running out of ammo at an alarming rate.}

"I thought that the Krogan liked a challenge." Aria commented casually.

{Aria, somehow it doesn't surprise me that you are here of all places.} Tirg said with disdain, {Be careful around her Admiral. You'll never know what could happen to you with Aria nearby, hehe.}

"Back on track Warlord Tirg, I'll send some Pelicans and Phantoms to evacuate your troops. We are glassing the planet, so I recommend you to board those ships."

{I wouldn't recommend it, Admiral. At least not before we shut down the generator in the main Palladium mine. If you glass that area without deactivating the generator, you could cause said generator to explode and destabilize the core of the planet because of the profundity of the mine. You do that, and this rock becomes an irreversible wasteland, or the planet explodes.} Tirg said it with a tone that made you wonder if he wanted to see such an event.

"Hades, what are the probabilities of the planet exploding if we glass that particular area?" Lasky asked.

"Analyzing. Sir, if that generator is destabilized and explodes, then there is a 71.3462% chance that the planet explodes alongside it. And if it does, it will destabilize the gravitational balance on the system, making the planets and the Relay inside the system fall into a collision course towards the star and in the end it will cause the star to become a supernova."

Sighting Lasky turned towards the communications screen, "Warlord, is that mine's generator the only one active?"

{Affirmative, in the other mines we managed to shut down the generators once the parasites started to move inside the mines. That was the only mine in which our teams didn't report back, and that was twenty-four hours ago.}

"Understood. Warlord, assemble a team to go to the mine, one of our SPARTAN teams will accompany you. Also send the order to the rest of the survivors in the planet to be ready to evacuate as soon as our dropships touch the ground. Shipmaster F'Dur, I want you to coordinate the glassing of the planet, tell the ships to NOT glass

anything in a radius of fifty kilometers from that Palladium mine."

Giving a grunt, the Warlord nodded and disconnected the line, while the Shipmaster nodded and moved towards communications to send the message.

"Hades, deploy the Frigates, they will provide covering fire for the evacuation. Make sure to scan everyone who boards any dropship and ship, if they are infected, put them under quarantine immediately. Kill them if they try to resist."

"Affirmative, Admiral." And with that Hades disappeared.

"I thought that once you were infected you turned into one of those parasites?" Aria said, a bit confused by the Admiral's order.

"It depends. If you are infected by the infection forms then you transform into one of them. But if it's by the spores in the air, then the transformation will take days, a week at the most. Naturally, our immunological systems are able to destroy those kinds of air-based infection, and if not, we have the necessary equipment to clean and cure the patient. But time is of the essence, if the infection has been inside the host for more than two days, then there's a 45% chance that we can save him/her. After that, your only salvation is the crematorium." Lasky explained.

"Hmm, in that case I would like to have one of those scanners. If what you say is true, then someone infected could board my station without anyone knowing." Aria said.

"Don't worry, the Alliance, as of ten hours ago, approved the deployment of the scanners to the _Citadel_, _Omega_, and all the important merchant and most populated planets in both Citadel space and the Terminus Systems. We don't want a sudden galactic infection happening. Those scanners should arrive in one to two days to every one of its destinations."

Aria nodded at that, 'Good, I don't want to deal with an intergalactic lethal flu.' She thought.

**October 14, 2574, 1550 Hours, Systems Alliance Calendar, Titan Nebula, Titan System, Docking Bay 3, UNSC Class-Infinity Warship
Infinity****. **

On one of the many docking bays inside the Infinity, a Pelican dropship was being prepared for departure. This ship in particular was equipped with a powerful scanner, capable of giving a thermal and sonar image of anything at fifteen kilometers underground. Provided that the Pelican was at least ten kilometers from the surface of the objective. The ship also was equipped with a 50. caliber turret in the front, two 30. caliber turrets in the sides and twenty air-land missiles. This was the ship designated to transport and provide support to Crimson team and the Blood Pack team in the surface.

Lieutenant Commander Axel or Crimson 1, moved towards the Pelican, followed by the rest of his team. He had a M45 TS-Shotgun and a pair of T25 DEP Plasma Pistols. Second-Lieutenant Sarx, or Crimson 2, had a T51 DER/1 Plasma Repeater, and a pair of Energy Swords. Lieutenant

Blackburn, or Crimson 3, had a BR55HB SR Battle Rifle and a pair of M7 Submachine guns. Finally Master Chief Petty Officer John-117, or Crimson 4, had a pair of T25 DER Plasma Rifles and a Flamethrower.

"Alright Crimson, our mission is simple. We are to enter a Palladium mine with another team of mercenaries and shut down the main generator of said mine. Our bird here," Axel said, while pointing at the Pelican, "will provide air support for the duration of the mission. Once the mine is shut down we'll send a signal to our ships so they can glass the area. Any questions?"

"Sir, do we have a time frame for the mission?" John asked.

"We have six hours to shut down the mine, if we don't make it by that time frame then the ships will glass the area regardless of the consequences. That's why they are sending us. Once we deactivate the generator, we will have three hours to exit the red zone." Axel explained.

Having no more questions, Crimson boarded the Pelican. While Crimsons 2, 3, and 4 put their gear in the compartments inside the dropship, Axel made his way to the pilot cabin.

"We are ready for departure." Axel announced.

"Understood sir, I recommend you to take a sit. We will depart in two."

Nodding to the pilot, Axel made his way to the back of the dropship. A few minutes later, the Pelican took off from the Infinity. Diving into the darkness of space, the dropship moved towards the planet. Inside, while the dropship made its entry through the atmosphere, the members of Crimson team checked their gear for a second time, and in some cases for the third time.

"Ready for round two, my friend?" Blackburn asked Sarx.

Looking at him, Sarx responded, "Yes, indeed I'm ready. The parasite will never know what hit them."

"That's the attitude." Blackburn responded with a smile.

[Crimson we are about to land, opening the cargo door, over.] The pilot said via intercom.

Just as the pilot make his announcement, the door to the cargo bay opened, letting the SPARTANS inside watch the planet. The land was a brown-yellow color, the skies looked greyish brown, and in the distance you could see various towers that were firing a rounded projectile once in a while. Crimson looked upwards a bit, only to see one of the Battlecruisers making its way to the mortar like towers. Seraphs and Short-Swords flew towards the same destination, their compartments already open to deploy their payload on the Flood AAG.

"Damn, no wonder why the Admiral wanted to glass this planet so badly. The entire area is covered completely by the Flood." Axel commented. The rest of Crimson only nodding at that remark.

The Pelican started to descend even more, its objective, a street inside a fortified town. Once the Pelican landed, Crimson team made its way out immediately, moving towards Warlord Tirg's position.

"Lieutenant Commander, I'm Warlord Tirg. I and Stratus Company will be accompanying you during the mission. I already have a pair of MAKOS tanks ready for transport. I just hope that you and your SPARTANS are as tough as the Alliance make them sound."

"Don't worry about that, Warlord. We will try to leave you guys something left to kill." Axel responded.

Giving a grunt at that, Tirg made his way to the MAKOS, Crimson moving right behind him. Arriving at Stratus Company's position, the SPARTANS took a look at the MAKOS. They were blocky in form with four wheels, the armor seemed reinforced with a few scratches here and there. In front of them, four Krogan stood, all of them already clad in brown armor, with some kind of shotgun and a few flamethrowers.

"Straus Company!" Tirg said calling for their attention, "We are leaving. It's time to show these pests why they don't mess with the Blood Pack. Now, everyone to the vehicles!"

The four members of Stratus Company made their way in to the second MAKO, while Crimson team and Warlord Tirg entered the first one. Meanwhile, the Pelican that brought Crimson to the surface took to the skies, ready to assist in any way possible during the duration of the mission.

Once everyone was inside, the tanks accelerated through the streets of the town, moving towards the exit gate. On the sides of the gate, members of the Blood Pack were firing their weapons viciously, some of them even using Alliance weaponry in order to gain time for the evacuation. Falcons and Phantoms gave air support for the troops on land, plasma and projectile fire tearing through Flood infection, combat, and tank forms like butter. Pelicans, Spirits, and Kodiak shuttles landed constantly, taking the land troops to the ships or deploying supplies.

Once outside of the town, the MAKOS were immediately assaulted by the Flood forces, though only the tank and a few combat forms could make real damage to the tanks. The turrets of said tanks opened fire on the enemy waves, making it look like a shooting practice field. From the air, the Pelican followed close by. Being at a sufficient altitude from which the pilot could use the turrets of the Pelican at their maximum effectiveness, but high enough to not be hit by the Flood ground troops.

Moving through the plain desert that once was a green forest, the MAKOS zigzagged and jumped through obstacles, shooting at anything that moved or seemed alive.

{Crimson team and Stratus Company, Delta 3-4 here, I suggest you to hold to something inside those vehicles. The glassing is about to begin. Over.} The pilot of the Pelican informed the groups in the tanks.

And just as he said those words of warning, a bright white light

could be seen in the distance. Said light was in fact concentrated plasma coming from the Battlecruiser that was nearby. Sand, rock, and anything with matter in them burned to a crisp or were transformed to a glass like substance in a matter of seconds. The ship, still firing its energy projector, moved through the planet, leaving behind a trail of melted destruction.

Even though the glassing was happening at least some fifty kilometers from the MAKOS' position, they could still feel the vibrations in the land. Looking through one of the screens inside the MAKO, Warlord Tirg watched the process which was glassing.

"Wouldn't the Council make a fuss out of this?" Tirg asked to the members of Crimson team.

"No, the treaty that we signed with them specifies that if we are to use any weapon of mass destruction INSIDE Citadel space, we have to give them a warning before hand and wait for the approval of said action. We are NOT inside Citadel space, and even then, Aria herself gave us permission. So the Council can't touch us legally, politically or military for this action." Axel explained.

"Ha! I'm starting to like the Systems Alliance even more. Maybe you are the warriors that we, Krogan, have been waiting for, an enemy which can grant us a great life when defeated or a glorified death."

"Well, I just hope that it doesn't come to that." Axel muttered to himself, a bit disturbed by the Krogan's way of thinking, "How far is the mine from here?"

"We should arrive at the entrance in a few minutes." Tirg responded.

A few minutes later the MAKOS came to a stop. The Pelican taking a circular path around the mine's entrance, looking for any sign of activity. Both teams disembarked the tanks, weapons at the ready. Moving towards the mine without any kind of ambush awaiting for them, the two teams proceeded inside with lights at the ready.

{Delta 3-4, Crimson 1 here, we are going in. Keep an eye out for any kind of activity out there.}

{Noted Crimson 1, good hunting. Delta 3-4 out and over.}

Both teams entered the mine, each one of them keeping an eye out for any sign of activity. The mine was dark and full of rocks blocking the way. A few terminals and notepads could be seen in the sides, as well as an elevator at the end of the cave. Moving towards the elevator, both teams entered to start their descend to the bottom of the mine. The elevator had no problem taking its heavy occupants, being constructed to lift several tons of minerals and rock, taking some SPARTANS and Krogans was no problem at all.

"Strange, there hasn't been any sign of activity since we arrived." John commented.

"What do you mean, Demon?" Sarx asked curiously.

"Well, for starters, the Flood never ceases their attacks unless they

have suffered more losses than the ones that they can afford, or when they are luring you into a trap. And being lured into a trap by the Flood is never a good thing to do."

"Hmm, then we will just kill them all, just like the pests that they are." Tirg said casually.

John looked at him, wondering if what the Warlord said was because of ignorance or stupid courage. But before he could say anything, the elevator shook and came to a sudden stop. Taken off guard by the action, some of the occupants fell or stumbled inside.

"Everyone alright?" Axel asked.

"Yes sir." The SPARTANS responded while the Krogans nodded in acknowledgement.

"In which sublevel are we?" Blackburn asked.

"We are three levels from our objective." One member of Stratus Company answered.

"Blackburn, do you have signal to radio call our bird?" Axel asked.

"Negative, there's interference. I'm assuming that it is coming from the generator."

"Alright. Let's start moving. Crimson 2 and 4 take point. Stratus Company, you cover our flanks. Crimson 3, you are with me covering our sixes."

After a bunch of "Yes Sir" and a few nods, the nine individuals exited the elevator. Turning on their flashlights, the first thing that the group noticed was that the cave was entirely covered by a yellowish brown substance. On the walls and ceiling of the cave, there were tumor like formations, each one of them housing dozens of Flood infection forms.

Ignoring the scenery around them, the group of nine moved ahead with their weapons ready to shoot at a moment's notice.

"Ugh, movement sensors are useless on here. With all the infection forms resting inside those tumor like things, our sensors are going crazy. Sir I suggest to send a scout team ahead, if there is something then he can radio us." Blackburn said.

"Negative, if we separate from the main group then the Flood will pick us one by one until all of us are dead." Axel responded.

"Sir, sending a scout group ahead would be wise right now. We are technically blind down here, and without knowing what await us ahead we could be walking into a trap without even noticing." John argued.

"Alright. Who volunteers for the scout team?" Axel said with sight.

"My Company and I will do it." Tirg said.

"Are you sure Warlord? The Flood is a relative new enemy for your people. Without knowing what you are against could prove counterproductive and dangerous."

"Don't insult us, SPARTAN, we are Krogan, we were made for this kind of situations. Besides it's not the first time that we encounter a similar enemy."

"Understood. Radio in if you encounter anything."

Nodding at the SPARTAN, Tigr and his Company started to move ahead of Crimson's position. Losing sight of them once they entered the next cave, Crimson moved carefully through the cave. The silence adding to the suspense and feeling of something wrong within each SPARTAN.

Moving to the next cave, the four SPARTANS noticed that it was a command center of sorts. Between the Flood organic material in the walls and ceiling, cables and terminals could be seen, some of them still functioning while others were on fire. Revising around for anything useful, the four SPARTANS continued their path. **ARGH!** Was the sound of something nearby. The four SPARTANS aimed their weapons at the position from which the sound came. Turning off their flashlights and turning on the nocturnal vision on their helmets, the four of them couldn't see a thing on the cave.

"Did any of you heard that?" Blackburn whispered to his companions.

"I did. It appears that we aren't alone anymore." Sarx responded.

Checking their corners once again, the four were about to check the sound's position when they suddenly heard, **SCRATCH!**

"That came from our six. Sarx you and me will check it out. Blackburn, Chief go and revise the first sound's position." Axel ordered.

The four SPARTANS moved immediately and effectively, surveying the room with a professional's touch. Chief took out his Flamethrower, while Blackburn readied his Battle Rifle. Using the nocturnal vision, the two of them moved back to the cave's entrance. Finding nothing, they were about to turn when suddenly John made a fist sign to Blackburn. Stopping in his tracks, Blackburn looked at John questioningly. John made a silence sign followed by pointing at the other cave. Looking inside, Blackburn spotted what appeared to be a Krogan that was giving them his back.

Using the zoom of his Battle Rifle's scope, Blackburn saw that, while it was a Krogan, it was a Krogan already infected. The thing had a bulbous thing in its back, its hand was replaced by some kind of sharpened organic blade and had a weapon of sorts encrusted in its other arm. Blackburn took aim at its center mass, while Chief readied the flamethrower. But before any of them could shot at it, the sound of a Plasma Repeater and a Shotgun was heard in the back of the cave. The Krogan infected by the Flood turned at hearing the sound of the weapons as well as the cry of agony of a Flood form. Looking directly at the two SPARTANS, the infected Krogan started running and firing its weapon at them. Both SPARTANS returned fire, the three burst

bullets from the Battle Rifle pierced through the beasts arm, effectively cutting it after some rounds. Chief's Flamethrower engulfed the thing in fire until it came to a stop and fell to the ground.

Turning around to go to their team members' position, both SPARTANS didn't notice as the infected Krogan stood behind them. Having spotted them, the infected Krogan ran at its prey, slamming directly into Chief, both of them fell to the floor. Seeing this, Blackburn immediately opened fire on the thing. The infected Krogan ignored the bullets coming from the rifle. Pinning Chief against the floor, the infected Krogan opened part of its back, releasing tens of infection forms which immediately started to swarm John.

Seeing this, John forced adrenaline into his system. Entering in what many call SPARTAN time, John positioned himself to deliver a powerful kick to his enemy, taking him out of on top of him, John rolled to the side before standing on the movement itself. Taking out both of his Plasma Rifles, John started to shoot at the infection forms. Blackburn cooping him, took out his two submachine guns and opened fire. Eliminating the immediate threat, both of them turned to the standing infected Krogan. The thing started to run at them again, but this time the SPARTANS were ready. Stepping aside, Blackburn took out a plasma grenade and implanted it on the things back, while John delivered a kick to it, pushing the thing even further away before the grenade exploded.

"You okay?" Blackburn asked.

"Yea, we should send a report of this new form to command. ONI will want to know about this thing's capabilities." John answered.

"Yea. Come, let's go before more of those things come."

With that, both SPARTANS moved towards Crimsons' 1 and 2 position. Arriving at their comrades' position, both SPARTANS noticed the many dead regular Flood combat forms on the ground.

"What took you two so long?" Axel asked.

"We encountered a new Flood form. This one appears to come from an infected Krogan. Apparently it still conserves the regeneration abilities of the Krogans, though it is at an accelerated rate." John explained.

"I see. Alright let'sâ€¦"

[Lieutenant Commander, you there? Stratus Company here, do you receive me? Over.]

[Stratus Company what's your status?] Axel answered.

[We are under heavy fire. We managed to find an auxiliary elevator, though the room was infested by the Flood. We also encountered some of our brothers already infected.] Tirg said with anger and hatred at the last part, [We need support now, the pests are using their numbers to overwhelm us, and with those things in the walls shooting at us we can't move to a better position.]

[Understood, hold on for a few more minutes. We will be there ASAP,

Over.]

With that the SPARTANS started to run towards the sound of gun fire. Sprinting through the caves, the SPARTANS arrived at Stratus' Company position in under sixty seconds. Taking on the scenery, John immediately used his flamethrower to burn the spider like Flood forms. The things never stood a chance against the flammable napalm that came from the weapon. Axel used his shotgun to kill the nearby Flood forms while Stratus Company and the rest of Crimson team provided suppressive fire.

After some minutes of exchanging fire with the Flood, the four SPARTANS and five Krogans managed to kill all of their opponents. After using the flamethrowers to burn the corpses, and checking the room for any Flood still left alive, both teams moved to the elevator. On the way down, both teams were reloading and checking their weapon, when.

***"Your resistance is futile. Like my predecessors once did, you will be harvested, converted and transformed into one of us. Your pitiful intents of winning this battle will be nothing compared to what awaits you. Because I, I am a monument to all your sins, and as such I will judge you accordingly!"**

And with that, the elevator was covered in silence once again. John stiffened a little at the remainder of when he went for Cortana on Grand Charity. Axel, Blackburn and Sarx felt, for the first time in a long time, fear. Not because of the message per say, but with the tone in which it was delivered, that didn't mean that they wouldn't complete the mission, each one of them was ready to fight until the end and even then, if they fell, they would do it by bringing as many as they could with them. The Krogan's reactions were similar to that of John, the message having reminded them of the Rachni Wars a few centuries ago.

"Alright, we need to hurry and complete our objective. We have three hours left before the ships decide to glass this area. We will move fast and with precision, kill everything that looks like the Flood by any means necessary and how you see fit. If any of us spots the Gravemind then notify the rest of us. Understood?" Axel said.

"Yes sir!" The SPARTANS answered while the Krogans smiled under their helmets at being given an open door to do what they are best at.

"Um, what's a Gravemind?" One Krogan of Stratus Company asked.

"Trust me, you will know it when you see it." John answered.

With that, the nine individuals exited the elevator and moved towards the generator's position. Its position being identify by an energy scanner installed in the motion sensors of each one of them. Once they were halfway through the cave, dozens of Flood combat forms started to swarm them through all directions. Tigr immediately summoned a singularity in front of them, trapping all Flood forms in a radius of two and a half meters. Another Krogan of Stratus Company summoned another singularity, this one on the back of the group. Like the first one, this singularity trapped all Flood forms in a radius of two meters. The SPARTANS meanwhile opened fire alongside the other

three members of Stratus Company, killing effectively the Flood forms on their flanks.

Both singularities proceeded to become unstable before detonating on themselves, killing a grand quantity of the Flood forms. The ones that survived the detonation were immediately put in a stasis biotic field before a warp detonated the stasis, killing the remaining Flood effectively.

Moving ahead, the deactivation team entered a big chamber like room. In the center were many cargo vehicles loaded with Palladium and other kind of minerals. Terminals and machinery adorned the walls, while in the far side of the room the generator stood emitting grand quantities of energy. But that was not the only things on the chamber like cave, dozens if not hundreds of Flood forms were patrolling in said room. And behind the generator, the Gravemind stood in all its glory, its tentacles moving around the cave, creating spores and the tumor like things on the walls and ceiling.

Taking cover behind some rocks, the nine individuals perched themselves in a position to get a good view of the situation before them.

"Well we know where the generator is as well as how to turn it off. Any one knows how to get past big ugly over there." Blackburn said.

"We will need to create a distraction so one or two of us can shut down the generator. Then we will need to exit the mine ASAP so our ships can glass the area." Axel responded.

"I could use the biotic technic charge to get to the generator fast, though I'll need someone covering my back so I can shut it down." Tirg said.

"That could work, how much time do you need to shut it down?" Axel asked.

"A minute, tops. Two if the generator is malfunctioning."

"Understood. This is the plan, Tirg you go in as soon as the Flood concentrates its attention on the rest of us. We will kill as many as we can, but remember don't let yourselves get cornered and always move at least in pairs so you can cover each other. Tirg, if the situation turns too hot and you can't shut down the generator then plug in these explosives," Axel said while giving Tirg said explosives, "They are set to detonate in three minutes. If we make it at least three levels above the explosion radius then we will be fine."

At seeing that no one had anything to say anymore, Axel held his hand open, counting down to five with his fingers. Once the counting finished, eight of the nine individuals popped out of cover, throwing grenades and shooting their weapons at the enemy. The Flood was taken by surprise, losing many of their numbers in the first five seconds of the firefight, but after recovering from the surprise, Flood combat, tank, turret, infection, and Krogan forms charged at their attackers while the Gravemind watched the events unfolding in front of itself.

Tirg took the opportunity to charge at the generator, using the correct amount of biotic energy, Tirg impulse himself to the back of the generator. Once at his destination, Tirg used his Omni-tool to connect himself to the generator's computer and started to shut down its systems.

Blackburn opened fire with his M7 Submachine guns at an incoming carrier form, making it explode delivering a dozen or so infection forms. John used the Flamethrower to burn said infection forms to a crisp while Blackburn killed a few combat forms coming their way. Once the napalm tank was spent completely, John threw the flamethrower to a nearby combat form which fell at the sudden weight increase. Taking out his Plasma Rifles, John proceeded to open fire on the incoming Flood.

Close by, two members of Stratus Company were in a state called blood lust, slamming and shooting at everything that resembled an enemy, the Flood were decreasing by the tens, only to be replaced at an even greater velocity. Using the Omni-Blade in their shotguns, both Krogans cut through the Flood bodies before shooting at another one. Meanwhile, Sarx and Axel were engaged in close combat with the Flood, Sarx using his pair of energy swords while Axel used his shotgun.

The Flood in response increased the ferocity of their attacks, managing in the process to circle two members of Stratus Company before killing them. Taking the chance, two infection forms entered the bodies of the dead Krogan before starting the grotesque process of transformation. This one in particular being slowed down by the natural regeneration factor that the brain of the Krogans was still using in hopes of reviving the body of its wearer.

The four SPARTANS and two Krogans were starting to lose ground. Both groups having retreated back to their initial cover, continued to fight viciously.

[Tirg! What's the hold up? We need to hurry, we are running out of ammo here!] Axel said.

[I'm almost done.] Tirg responded. A few seconds later his voice came again through the intercom, [I'm done! I already sent the signal to the ships above.]

[Good job, now come back to our position so we canâ€¦|Look out!]

The Gravemind swung one of his tentacles towards Tirg's position, having noticing his prey, and wasting no time at all in eliminating it. A big cloud of sand was lifted as the cave shook from the impact. A few rock fell from the ceiling, killing some of the Flood forms in their path. Lifting its tentacle, the Gravemind was a bit surprised at seeing a blue energy dome and underneath, the still breathing Krogan. Wasting no more time, the Gravemind swung his tentacle again, but this time Tirg was faster and impulse himself with charge towards his companions' position. A bit exhausted at the use of energy to withstand said blow, Tirg took out his shotgun firing on the incoming Flood.

"Everyone retreat now! Tirg, the explosives." Axel said.

Passing him the explosives, Axel set them up to one minute before throwing them in the entrance to the auxiliary elevator room. The remaining seven members of the deactivation team entered the elevator before clicking the upper floor level button.

Shooting at the incoming Flood while the elevator's doors closed, the explosives detonated just as the elevator started its ascend. The cave below collapsed, burying everything beneath it and at the same time pushing the elevator upwards a bit.

"Well, no one can say that that wasn't exciting." Blackburn commented while the rest of them just let out a small breath of satisfaction.

October 14, 2574, 1950 Hours, Systems Alliance Calendar, Titan Nebula, Titan System, UNSC Class-Infinity Warship **_Infinity**_**, Bridge.**

"Sir, the deactivation insertion team has confirmed the deactivation of the generator and has been already evacuated." Hades informed Lasky.

Not looking from the T.H.P. Lasky sent some command to the ships on the planet. Giving them the green light to glass the red zone.

"Where's the deactivation team currently?" Lasky asked.

"Being disinfected and revised in the medic bay. They are under quarantine, per protocol's orders." Someone in the bridge answered.

Changing the hologram in the T.H.P., Lasky looked at the holographic representation of the planet. The ships glassing said planet being represented in green, while the ships making up the blockade around the planet in blue. So far, the evacuation of the planet had been completed two hours ago. And the planet has been 30% glassed, according to Hades it will take another 10 hours to complete the glassing of the planet.

"I still can't believe that the Council let your government keep weapons capable of this." Aria commented, while watching the glassing of the planet in one of the satellite images. She, along Grizz and Garka, were disturbed at what they were seeing. Never in their lives had they seen something not even remotely similar, the closest thing to this being Tuchanka but even then that planet looked like a five star garden world compared to what was happening to Libera.

"That's because we aren't part of the Citadel, we are considered allies and trade partners for the moment. Though something tells me that the public will have a negative opinion once they find out about what happened here. And we can't tell them anything regarding the Flood to acclimate their voices, at least not without causing a massive panic." Lasky responded.

Putting that thought for another time, Aria asked instead, "I suppose that our agreement still stands. Even though it appears that you eliminated the threat that you were looking for. Am I right?"

"That is correct, Aria. Though our visits will be a bit infrequent

from now on."

"That's okay, just don't intervene in any way or form in my operations and the Terminus will treat you well." She answered with a small smirk.

Lasky just shook his head at the remark before leaving to his quarters. He had a lot of reports to fill and send to command.

October 16, 2172, 1430 Hours, Citadel Council Calendar, Widow System, **_Citadel Station**_**, Presidium, Council Personal Chambers.**

"I suppose that by now everyone read the reports. Am I correct?" Sparatus started the meeting with the other Councilors.

Nodding in the affirmative, Tevos said, "I'm glad that the Alliance managed to repel such an attack in a relatively quick time. Also, there's the matter that they focused on evacuating civilians as soon as they got the threat of an attack. That speaks well of their intentions and society as a whole."

"Indeed it does, Tevos." Sparatus reaffirmed.

"There's also the information that we gathered from the Alliance. STG agents reported that at the early stages of the conflict, both alliance personnel and the Turian military forces had a hard time agreeing on the tactics to use. But after a while the Alliance and Turians managed to find a balance between the differences in tactics and employed them effectively. This shows adaptability for the Alliance, just like the Turian military." Valern started to say, "Regarding their weapons capabilities for the ground troops, it appears that we are at the same level with their different branches of weapons. Their projectile weapons, while carrying more kinetic force than our mass accelerator weapons, don't fire as fast as our own, which is where we compensate. Their plasma weaponry though, is on another level, the only way to compensate for that is to create shields that resist that kind of weaponry or to create plasma weaponry of our own."

"Will just put the Quarrians to work on a solution for the shields or work to create an inhibitor for those weapons." Sparatus said.

"And what did you find regarding their space warfare capabilities?" Tevos asked.

"That's where they surpass us the most. While our ships are designed to be more agile and fast, their ships are designed to be agile, fast and to take a lot of punishment. Though not as fast or agile as our own, their shields and armor compensate for that. In terms of defense, their ships have at least two different systems of defense that can also be used offensively in a ship to ship knife combat situation. Offensively, their ships have mass accelerators that surpass ours by a hundred times. Where ours deliver kinetic force in the tens, theirs deliver kinetic force in the hundreds, thousands in the case of their defense stations around the planet. That's something that we can't compensate with our current reactors used on the ships."

"We will have to find an alternate energy solution then. Though with centuries of using mass effect fields as our main power source that can be difficult." Sparatus said.

"There were two things that called to my immediate attention on the report." Tevos suddenly said, "The matter concerning the use of nuclear bombs above the Planet's atmosphere being one. And the fact that there were five ships measuring twenty nine kilometers long. Surely there was a flaw in the report in that last one. Even though the Alliance possess thirteen kilometer long ships, surely there can't be ships of those magnitudes."

"I wish it wasn't true. Analysts revised the footage and measured the ships, and to our utter surprise and horror, they were indeed twenty-nine kilometer ships." Valern answered Tevos worries.

"Then why didn't the Alliance informed us of this?" Tevos said a bit alarmed.

"To have an ace up their sleeve. At least that's what I would have done. Don't you remember when the Turians joined the Citadel, we pulled something similar back then, though much smaller compared to this." Sparatus answered.

"And the worst part of all is that, we can't demand the Alliance to dismantle those monstrosities of ships because we don't have solid proof that they even possess one of those." Tevos said.

"My concern is in what the Alliance hasn't told us. For all we know, they have a weapon capable of affecting only a single species or they could be constructing an entire planet." Valern said a bit excited at the prospect of seeing such capabilities.

"Anyways, regarding the use of nuclear weapons, we can't say anything about it because it was inside their space. Regarding the events in the Terminus Systems, for what some of my sources found, it appears that the Alliance has made Aria an ally if she has agreed so willingly to cover the events that happened on Libera." Sparatus said.

"What happened in Libera?" Tevos asked.

"The entire planet has been glassed. Some reconnaissance teams were sent to investigate and they found a melted rock covered in a crystal like substance. Not one space of land was spared." Sparatus said, "Though that action has its justification well placed. Two hours ago a report from the Alliance arrived at my terminal. It appears that the infected ship crashed on the planet and infected the entire colony in a matter of hours. There was no other option left besides the glassing of the colony."

"By the goddess! Please tell me that the colonists were evacuated."

"The ones who weren't infected or showed signs of being in the process of infection were. Also the Alliance sent scanners to the _Citadel_, _Omega_, and all important planets in the galaxy. Those scanners can detect someone infected by the Flood, this way we can prevent a galactic infection."

"Well that's a relief." Tevos said.

"I think that this meeting is over. We would put our R&D to maximum capacity." Sparatus said.

"There's something more Councilors," Valern said, "It appears that the society of the Systems Alliance is more unstable than we thought. The Alliance informed me that a new group of insurgents has been born. The group call itself CERBERUS. It is composed of victims of the Human-Covenant war and idealistic members who are xenophobic to all non-Alliance members. The Alliance has classified it as dangerous and extremist, they recommended us to use lethal force if we encounter them."

"We will have to alert our patrols about this, also we will have to accelerate most of our projects if we want to defend ourselves effectively against an enemy who shares technology with the Alliance." Sparatus said.

With that, the three Councilors exited the chamber. Each one of them going to do their respective duties.

****A/N:** And here's another chapter. Please review, let me know what you think of it.**

****Also** I'm sad to announce that I'm not sure when the next chapter is going to be ready because I'm moving from the estate and well I will be spending the following weeks packing and all that stuff. Still I will try to upload it ASAP.**

12. CERBERUS' Recruitment

****The Next Great Journey****

****A/N:** And I'm back with a new chapter. I'm glad to say that I finally finished moving, so that means no more packing! :) hehe. Thanks again to everyone who clicked favorite or follow and also to the ones that took the time to post a review.**

****IMPORTANT NOTICE #1:** I want to thank Lord Izanagi for Beta read the chapter for all my grammatical errors, Thank you very much.**

****IMPORTANT NOTICE #2:** This chapter signifies the start of a new arc for the story. From now on, there won't be a lot of action, the story will take a turn to a cold war like conflict. But at the same time the events of Mass Effect 1 will be happening as well as the 2 year period between Mass Effect 1 and 2. Though I won't be doing it day by day, sometimes the timeline will jump days, weeks, or months so *****pay attention to the setting changes***.****

****IMPORTANT NOTICE#3:** I changed the format of the Codex of the story, I think that it will be easier to read and understand it in this new version. So if you want to check it out go ahead. :P It has been updated to current events in the story.**

Now onto the chapter.

"Speaking"

'Thoughts'

[Radio Communications, Ground forces-Ground forces, and Ship-Ship]

{Ground to Ship Communications}

Flash back of previous chapter(s)

Flash Back

'Messages on Screen'

Sound Effects

Line Break just shows a change of scenery.

Disclaimer: I don't own Halo or Mass Effect, both belong to their respective owners.

Chapter 12: CERBERUS' Recruitment

October 24, 2574, 1300 Hours, Systems Alliance Calendar, Reincarnation System, **_Arcturus Station**_**. **

Captain Ronald Foley walked through the merchant sector of _Arcturus Station_. He was scheduled to meet with the ex-Alliance soldier, Lieutenant Jacob Taylor. His mission, for lack of a better word, was to convince Lieutenant Taylor to join CERBERUS. He had also received orders straight from T.I.M., (The Illusive Man), that he was to do anything necessary to convince Lieutenant Taylor of joining, unless said action compromised the organization.

Moving through the merchant sector, Captain Foley could see the influence that the Citadel government had on the society. Food, goods and other merchandises that were of non-Alliance origin were available to buy on the station. Though, all non-military Alliance members had to schedule a "blind flight" to the station with days of anticipation, though this didn't stop merchants and civilians from visiting. Not even the extended scans of each thing that every visitor brought stopped them from coming.

Arriving at a restaurant where the meeting will take place, Captain Foley seated himself in the back corner of the establishment. He set up a small jammer under the table, which will make the cameras surveying that particular place useless; also, any kind of sound waves that traveled more than a one meter radius from the device's location would become a static-like sound to other kinds of recording devices.

Foley was dressed in a civilian attire as to not call any kind of attention to himself, and considering the theme of conversation that will soon take place in that particular location, it was more of a necessity than a liability. Looking through the menu, Foley ordered some food and drinks while he waited for his guest. Some minutes later, a tall, dark skinned man entered the establishment. Looking around, he spotted Foley before moving towards him. If the Captain took notice, he didn't show it, opting instead to continue eating his food.

"I heard that this restaurant serves the best spicy food on the station." The unknown man said.

"That depends," Foley said, stopping a bit to swallow his food, "on how much water you have with you." He finished, chuckling a bit.

"Captain Foley," The unknown man said while doing a discrete salute to the Captain, "I suppose that there's a reason for all of these precautions?"

"Indeed there is, Lieutenant Taylor. Please take a seat, I took the liberty to order some food for our meeting."

Taking a seat in front of him, the Lieutenant took a look around, making sure this was not some kind of ambush. It wasn't anything personal, but his years in the military taught him to always be alert, even in the friendliest of environments. Meanwhile, Foley just looked at Taylor's actions with hidden amusement. 'He will be a good asset to CERBERUS, that's for sure. But, will our motives be enough to convince him of joining us?' Foley thought.

"First of all, let's drop ranks for now. We are posing as civilians after all, so please call me Mr. Foley, and I will call you Mr. Taylor, if that's okay with you?" Foley said.

"Jacob will suffice, Mr. Foley. Now, as far as I understand, you have a job offer for me. My question is, of what kind of job are we talking about?"

"Excuse me, Jacob, if I put aside the answer for that particular question for now. First of all, I understand that, in regards to our current period of time, you are very open minded with the Alliance's relationships with the Citadel government. Though you will not hesitate to defend the Alliance from them if the need arises. Correct?"

Nodding at that, Jacob responded, "Of course. Provided that we are the ones defending ourselves and not the aggressors. Though, if a war were to break out between both governments, then I'll be one of the first to return to the military."

Nodding in approval to that statement, Foley took out a folder from his portfolio. Showing the contents inside to Jacob, he saw pictures alongside reports of different species under the Citadel's government jurisdiction, and from different actions that the Council took in the past.

"We gathered that information from the Councilors' personal terminals, and the Citadel's data banks. ONI believes that, with our current status with the Citadel government, the Councilors will try to even the technological and military playing fields with us." Foley explained, "The Turian and Salarian Councilors are the most likely to take action in regards to our current situation. The Turians will invest in military development, all the way from personal weapons to shield technology on their ships. The Salarians will try to avoid any kind of conflict, but at the same time they, will gather information from our technology, military, political, and social fields by any means necessary, as long as the method used is a discrete one. The

Asari Councilor will try to forge a deal with us in what regards to most of our technologies and military armaments. A deal that will weaken our military forces greatly. And with the Loyalists still out there, that's a luxury that we can't have. The attack on Phoenix nine days ago is living proof of that."

"What makes you so sure of that, Mr. Foley? If my memory serves me right, the Alliance and the Citadel agreed in sharing some technology as well as having a minimal Alliance military presence in Citadel space. With the basic Slip-Space technology that we shared, and I mean the theories and science behind the first Slip-Space drive developed by humanity, Citadel scientists will have a hard time understanding it. I mean, I'm not expert but, even I know that Slip-Space and element zero or eezo don't combine very well. At least not without the proper shield technology and some kind of stabilizer. That should leave them with their hands full for some decades." Jacob answered.

"While that is true, it is no coincidence that the Citadel Council decided to welcome back with open arms the Quarians. Jacob, ask yourself this: Why would the Citadel Council pardon the crimes of the Quarians now, after three hundred years? Is it because they learned their lesson? Or perhaps because the Council thought that they had suffered enough in their exile? Or is it because they have the best minds in technological fields in the galaxy?"

Jacob considered Foley's words, 'It is true that the Citadel's pardon of the Quarians now is a bit suspicious. Especially when the Quarians, besides the Salarrians, are the only ones capable of understanding and applying our technology in a faster amount of time. Though, if what the Captain is insinuating is right, then that means that the Citadel is working its way up to a better position in the negotiations table. And with a military force like theirs, if they manage to even the playing field, we could be looking at a second Covenant War if we don't comply with their demands.'

While Jacob thought about Foley's inquiries, Foley was observing and analyzing Jacob's expressions. 'Well, it looks like it is time to drop the bomb. Though, if he doesn't accept, then we will have to keep a sharp eye on him, or eliminate him. A pity, but you never win a conflict like this if you are soft. I just hope that he accepts, or at the very least that he is willing to cooperate somehow with us.' He thought, before calling for Jacob's attention once again.

"Jacob, answering to your first question, the organization that I'm working for, wants you to join us. I'm sure that you have heard the announcement by the Alliance of a group called CERBERUS?" Looking at Jacob, Foley could see the surprise, before realization crossed through his eyes. His posture changed to one of someone wary and cautious. 'He would be a good addition indeed, though I will have to reveal more information in order to convince him. "By your expression, I assume that you have indeed heard of us." It wasn't a question, it was a statement.

"I have, though my question is why would a terrorist group come to me and reveal such information when you perfectly know that I could report all of this to the Alliance?" Jacob said in a harsh but weary tone.

"Because CERBERUS is an organization founded and supported by ONI and

the Alliance."

"Say what?" Jacob, once again was surprised by the man in front of him.

"Look, Jacob, like I said before, the Citadel Council is taking action in order to even the playing field with us. And you know, as well as I, that ONI will take action to prevent that. Though, ONI can't do that without causing suspicions that could lead to a galactic war. That's why the Alliance and ONI created CERBERUS, we are the deceiving factor in this equation. With us causing trouble, like sabotaging and attacking Citadel operations, and at the same time gathering information, the Citadel will focus its attention on us rather than ONI and the Alliance. This will give them the window of opportunity to stop infiltrations on Alliance space, as well as to gather more secure information without anyone suspecting that the Alliance is behind it." Foley explained.

"I still don't see how that could work entirely. If your plans are to make the Citadel Council think that CERBERUS is a totally different faction, shouldn't CERBERUS attack the Alliance as well?" Jacob asked, a bit confused and perplexed at Foley's explanation.

"Not necessarily, the Alliance informed the Citadel Council about CERBERUS existence so that they could focus their attention on us. Officially, we are a terrorist faction made up of insurgents and nationalist extremists that want nothing to do with the Citadel government."

"And unofficially, CERBERUS is working with the Alliance in order to prevent a full scale galactic war." Jacob finished.

"You catch on fast, Jacob." Foley praised.

"Then, why try to recruit me? I'm just a soldier, I know almost nothing of espionage and covert operations. My expertise is on the battlefield and coordination of extraction operations."

"We are not asking you to infiltrate the Citadel and plant bugs or something similar. No, we ARE recruiting you because you are one of the best in doing what you do. We will assign you in operations that require the extraction of some kind of artifacts and/or security for important facilities. If you are detained by Citadel forces while protecting one of our installations, you can claim that your job was to guard that ALLIANCE installation. Both the Alliance and CERBERUS will back up any agent in that situation. If you are caught while extracting one of those artifacts, then there's nothing that we can do to save you besides breaking in whatever prison that they hold you on. Though that will label you as a terrorist for the rest of your life outside Alliance space."

"Do I have to decide now, or do I have time to think about your offer?" Jacob asked with a thoughtful expression.

Smiling at the question, Foley replied, "Of course. Take your time to decide. Once you made up your mind, send your acceptance or declination to our offer on this frequency." He passed Jacob a small card with a series of numbers and letters on it.

Taking it, Jacob stood up from the table, ready to leave the

establishment and go to his apartment to think about the conversation. Giving a handshake to the Captain, Jacob left the restaurant, while Captain Foley was watching everything with amusement and a victorious smile on his face. He returned to keep eating his food for a while, enjoying the tranquility of the moment for a little bit more.

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Once in his apartment, Jacob left the card given to him next to his terminal. Sitting on the chair in front of his terminal, he debated with himself over whether taking up the offer would be a good idea. 'Working and being part of CERBERUS could be devastating to my life if I get captured by the Citadel authorities. Though, this could also be some kind of trap and I could be accused of treason to the Alliance. In the other hand, I wouldn't put it past ONI to not come with something like this, even though their methods are more moral now, they still are the same bastards that will do everything to secure the Alliance and gain information on possible threats to the Alliance.' Sighing tiredly, Jacob looked at the card next to the terminal before continuing his internal debate. 'There's also the matter that, if what Captain Foley told me is true, then by joining, I could be doing something that can save many lives in the future. There would be minimal to no red tape blocking me from doing my job, and there would be no politics and several consequences, depending on how I do my job.'

Looking at his terminal once again, Jacob turn it on. After it finished loading and he logged into his account, Jacob entered to his message application and typed the frequency given to him on the address window. He stopped there to think once again of what to do now. 'If I refuse to join them, and if Captain Foley was right, I will not be able to live with myself knowing that I could have done something to prevent a possible conflict, if there is a conflict in the future, that is. But if I join and this results in some kind of trap, I could do something to stop CERBERUS from the inside, and if they are truthful in their intentions, I will be saving a lot of lives in the coming future.'

Having made up his mind, Jacob typed his response to the Captain's offer and sent it. Turning off the terminal, Jacob moved to his room in order to rest for a while, the events of today having stressed his mind.

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Outside the station, on a cloaked ship, Captain Foley was enjoying a cup of coffee while looking at his next assignment on a nearby terminal. He was to go to Reach and recruit two more people there before reporting back to T.I.M. A beeping sound notified him that he had gotten a message. Opening the message, Foley smiled at the contents, it said: '_I'm in. Lieutenant Taylor.' _

"Randal," Captain Foley called to the ship's AI, "Send a message to T.I.M., tell him that Mr. Taylor has been successfully recruited to our cause."

"Affirmative, Captain. Is there something else that I can assist you with, or can I return to my other duties?"

"Plot a course to Reach, and while we are in Slip-Space, prepare the holographic chess board. I got a score to settle with you." Foley replied with some humor to the last part.

"In that case, good luck in beating me, Captain." Randal responded, chuckling a bit.

Once the ship entered Slip-Space, an image of a chess board appeared in one of the Captain's terminals. 'Time to show Randal what war is really about.' He thought while making his opening move.

****October 25, 2574, 0600 Hours, Systems Alliance Calendar, Epsilon Eridani System, Reach, Eposz Continent, Babd Catha Ice Shelf, Systems Alliance Military Facility.****

Captain Foley once again walked through a bunch of corridors that weren't part of his ship. His destination being the target practice room. According to the commander in charge of the SPARTAN IVs' training, that is where Foley will find the next person in his list of recruits to do.

Entering the target practice room, the first thing that Foley noticed was the sound of a DMR being fired. Looking around, Foley spotted Second Lieutenant Kai Leng on the simulator.

Targets were appearing left, right, and center at different time intervals. Using a modified DMR for this kind of training, Kai Leng shot simulated rounds to his targets, seeing how they dropped dead or took cover once their shields were hit. Though, his targets weren't completely inoffensive, they were also shooting at him with simulated weapons of all types and forms. Starting with 21st century Human weapons all the way up to 26th century Human weapons, Covenant weapons, Forerunner weapons, and, more recently added, Citadel and Terminus space origin weapons. The goal of this particular kind of simulation was to make the one training adapt to different situations as well as prioritizing targets.

Looking at the terminal responsible of the simulation, Foley saw that, as of right now, Kai Leng had a streak of 359 killed enemies in a span of fifteen minutes. His accuracy was marked as 98.23% and 250 headshots. 'Impressive, to think that the Alliance is willing to let us recruit him with this kind of marks. But then again, he is the best in spec-ops.' Foley thought.

Ending the simulation, Kai Leng looked at his visitor, noticing that it had the rank of Captain, he saluted.

"Sir!"

"At ease, Second Lieutenant. I would like to borrow a bit of your time, if possible." Foley said.

"Of course, sir."

The two of them took seats next to some crates, the SPARTAN took the time to analyze his superior. He noticed the small yellow emblem that marked CERBERUS's personnel. 'So he is here to ask me to join them or to do a job for them. I wonder what that would be.' Kai thought. Being a SPARTAN, he as well as the rest of the SPARTANS in the Alliance, knew the real purpose of CERBERUS, as well as who was

backing them up. This was because the new organization may need the help of SPARTANS in some operations, and as to not cause any kind of hostilities between both groups, the SPARTANS were informed about it.

"I suppose that you already know who sent me here?" Seeing Kai nod, Foley proceeded, "Then I'll cut to the chase. I'm here to recruit you. Surely you know that CERBERUS is a newborn in the grand scheme of things, so that's why we need your abilities and expertise in what you do."

"And what is it that I do that has CERBERUS wanting me to join them?"

"The fact that, in what concerns to stealth and covert operations, you are the best that there is. If the Alliance needs someone taken care of without leaving a trace, they call you. If they need someone to infiltrate a highly secure base or installation, you are the perfect individual for the job. Having you on CERBERUS will increase our success rate of victories in the operations that we do."

"I see. While I'll admit that I'm the best in what I do, I can sincerely say that it is not easy. To achieve the completion of a mission like I do, you need to have a good team, the necessary resources, the adequate training and trust in your partners. If I join, I'll be lacking the trust factor because I know no one in your organization. Though that's something that changes with time, you will have to make sure that whatever team that you put me in has the necessary training according to my standards. Now, both you and me, know that by the end of this conversation I'll be part of your little espionage group. If you are wondering how I know that, it is because first of all, you are ex-ONI, second of all, the Alliance military has been talking about some kind of promotion and relocation regarding me."

"Sharp as ever, I see. Well this just makes my job easier. Now, any questions or requests that you have?"

"Two things only. The first one is that I get to pick my team."

"Done." Foley responded.

"The second, is that you tell me what exactly I'm up against. If I don't have that information, then I won't be able to do my job as effectively as always. I'll be needing that information at least two weeks before my first assignment."

"It will be delivered to you tomorrow at 0800 hours in your weapons locker. I also suggest to be ready for shipment as soon as possible. We will call on your services soon, have a good rest of your day, Second Lieutenant." Foley said while standing.

"Sir." Kai responded with a salute.

Exiting the target practice room, Foley started to hear the sound of weapons being fired again, 'That was a really short conversation. I wonder if my next recruitment would be as easy and fast as this one. No, I don't think so, according to her file, I'm up to an interesting conversation.' Foley thought.

Once outside the base, Foley got on a Warthog that will take him to a landing pad nearby.

****October 25, 2574, 1000 Hours, Systems Alliance Calendar, Epsilon Eridani System, Reach, Eposz Continent, New Alexandria.****

Miranda Lawson made her way through the crowds that inhabited New Alexandria towards a nearby caf   where she was to meet with someone who hopefully could help her in her current dilemma. Having received a message some hours ago that contained some interesting information that only her and her father should know, piqued enough of her curiosity to make her accept the invitation of the stranger. Of course she was prepared in case this was a huge set up, bringing her M6G Magnum pistol for security measures, she wouldn't let anyone capture her that easily.

Arriving at her destination, Miranda observed the occupants inside the caf  . She noted that most of them were common people, persons that you will see only once and never see them again in this big city. One of the occupants in particular called her attention, he was dressed in an expensive attire, and had this aura of mystery and authority with him. The stranger looked up, having spotted her, and made a sign with his hand to come nearby. Approaching carefully, she saw that the stranger had a strange symbol in each side of his arms. Having never seen this symbol, and knowing that he wasn't working for her father, she lowered her guard a bit. Not entirely, after all this could still be a small deception.

"Miranda Lawson, I presume?" At her nod the stranger continued, "I'm Captain Foley, former ONI." He said while showing her his badge of ONI.

Raising an eyebrow at the statement, Miranda asked, "Former?"

"Yes. I'll explain in due time, but for now, please take a seat." He answered while gesturing with his hand to the chair in front of him.

Once both of them were seated, Captain Foley decided to continue the conversation, "I'm sure that you are curious to know how I managed to get such personal information regarding your family, am I correct?" Taking Miranda's silence and lack of expression as his cue to continue, Foley moved to the main point of the conversation, "Miss Lawson, my organization and I want to help you with your current problem."

"And what exactly is it that you want from me? Because I don't believe that your organization wants to help me out of the kindness of your hearts." Miranda said.

"We expect nothing in return. What your father is doing goes against what the Alliance stands for. I mentioned earlier that I was former ONI, that's because now I work for an organization that, like ONI, looks for a way to protect and ensure the progress of the Alliance in all fields: technological, political, and social. What your father is doing goes against those goals, but as of right now we can't do nothing more than help you relocate and hide your sister from your father's control."

"And what is the name of this organization of yours? As far as I know, there is no organization with those goals that works under the Alliance besides ONI. And even then, they aren't as generous as your organization seems."

"Officially, we are recent enemies of the Alliance and the Citadel government. Unofficially, we work for the Alliance to achieve all those goals that I mentioned before, but we do it without all the red tape blocking our way."

Blinking once at the realization as to whom Miranda was dealing with, she put, discretely, one hand in the holster of her pistol before responding, "I see. Then I'll ask again, what is it that CERBERUS wants from me?"

Smiling at the statement, Foley decided to make his offer known, "Your mind is as sharp as the reports said, though I assure you that the weapon that you have is unnecessary. CERBERUS wants you to join our cause, with some training provided by us, you will become one of our best spies that our organization will have. Of course you can always decline our offer, and continue with your current way of life."

"And your organization will not provide the help that you mentioned if I decline, am I correct?"

"We will still provide it, at least for a time. But for that time your sister will stay secure from your father, of that I assure you." Seeing Miranda's thoughtful expression Foley continued, "Look at it in this way Miss Lawson. If you join our cause, you could help millions, if not billions, of citizens in the Alliance from suffering. As the situation between the Alliance and the Citadel stands now, we are in what history will call the second cold war, or the first galactic cold war. One mistake from either side, or one person with enough resources to cause a war, and we will have a galactic war upon us. The Alliance needs people like me and all the ones in ONI and CERBERUS to prevent that. Granted that one mistake from our part and everything goes downhill. That is why ONI and CERBERUS is making sure that, if in the end all comes to a war, the Alliance suffers the minimum of casualties and damage from it."

"You are asking me to 'officially' betray the Alliance only to gain your help regarding my current problem. I may be looking for a way to permanently solve my current problems, but I will not do something as low as what you are asking me to do. Besides, even if I accepted your offer, why your organization would spend several of their resources, only to train me in order to become one of your best spies. Don't you get many of those from ONI or the Alliance already?"

"It is true that what we are offering seems unusual for an organization like ours, but the reason that we are recruiting you in particular is because of your brilliant mind and skills to blend in with the rest of society. Most of our spies don't fit that bill easily because of the traumas that the Human-Covenant war left on them."

"My brilliant mind, and skills to blend in with the rest of society? So that's what this is all about."

"On the contrary, my main goal here is to help you with your current

problems and to make CERBERUS's offer clear and present for you to consider. If you are worried that once you join our cause you will be immediately marked as some type of terrorist, then you are sadly mistaken. If you join, the records will show nothing regarding my organization. And even if someone tries to investigate deeper, ONI and CERBERUS will be backing you up in order to prevent that your allegiance is known. So, what do you say? Do you want to help our cause, which in turn assures you that your sister will be protected permanently and that you may be able to make history, or do you decline our offer, which in turn only assures your sister's protection temporarily? The decision is yours, Miss Lawson."

'It looks like Captain Foley has me in a crossroad. If I decline his offer, then his organization will surely keep a sharp eye on the rest of my life, and in doing that my father could find out what I'm trying to do. But if I accept the offer, I'll be able to ensure a better future for my sister.' Sighing with fatigue, Miranda answered Foley's question, "It looks like I really don't have much of a choice. Where do I go to sign up?"

"For now, just continue with your current way of life, in two days an agent will come and contact you, that's when we will have everything prepared to help your sister under your terms. I'll suggest to be ready to move by then, too." Standing up and leaving some money on the table, Captain Foley continued, "Have a nice day Miss Lawson, I'll be seeing you in a few days." And with that, Captain Foley exited the place.

"What have I gotten myself into?" Miranda murmured to herself.

****October 28, 2172, 1843 Hours, Citadel Council Calendar, Widow System, Citadel Station, Industrial District.****

The industrial district of the Citadel, one of the places that supplied the Citadel itself with most of its energy and also a place full of activity at any time of the day or night. Workers of many factories walked outside through the streets to either go home, work, or get a ride to somewhere else. But this district also housed many warehouses, many of which contained shipments of merchandise ready to be sold in the next few days.

In one of these particular warehouses, Detective Garrus Vakarian followed a lead of a local contrabandist who he suspected was responsible for smuggling illegal weaponry into the Citadel. Moving through the records in one data-pad that he found near some crates, Garrus copied the records of the many shipments and the cargo that each one contained to his Omni-Tool.

'This information will surely put Sardart Nirral behind bars, and with him out of the streets, the black market on the Citadel will become almost nonexistent.' Garrus thought happily. Putting the data-pad where it was, Garrus was ready to depart when he suddenly heard the sound of the main gates opening. Thinking fast, Garrus activated his tactical camouflage, moving behind some crates before his temporal invisibility timed out.

"Alright people, the boss wants to secure the cargo on the gunships by midnight. Everyone start working, Eben you are helping me delete all the records."

Garrus swore to himself for his bad timing. Sending a message of his location to C-Sec headquarters as well as a code red situation, Garrus took out his Predator pistol. Being the only weapon that he carried with him to this small endeavor, Garrus surveyed the area in order to think of a strategy that will let him live, at least, until dinner time.

'Ten to fifteen mercenaries, maybe more. I could probably take two or three silently using my tactical camouflage before anyone else starts noticing the disappearances. After that, this warehouse is transformed into a shooting gallery with me as the duck. C-Sec should arrive in five to ten minutes, until then the two extra thermal clips will have to suffice.' Garrus thought.

Having a somewhat functional plan in mind, Garrus activated his tactical camouflage and moved towards the lights control panel. Seeing a lone mercenary near the lights control panel, Garrus readied his pistol, activating the concussion rounds mode. This new modification was recently available only for C-Sec and SPECTRES personal. It was similar to the concussion round but this modification forced the normal rounds of the pistol to move slower and made them non-lethal from mid-long ranges. This recent mod was designed, because with your regular concussion round, the target of said round most of the time suffered extensive bone fractures that made it almost impossible to interrogate suspects.

Taking aim, Garrus fired three projectiles, the force of the three being enough to knock out the lone mercenary with his barriers deactivated. Moving ahead, Garrus checked the time. 'Three more minutes and C-Sec is all setup to capture everyone inside.' Arriving at the lights control panel, Garrus connected his Omni-Tool in order to load an Overload program into the system silently as to not call attention to his position. 'Come on, come on. Just a bit moreâ€¦ and done.' Just as Garrus finished his train of thought, all the lights on the warehouse turned off.

"Hey! What happened with the lights?" Someone shouted.

"The systems must have burned out or something." Someone else replied with little care.

"You! Yes You! Go and check the lights. Everyone else look around, it is possible that we have some rats in here."

Moving away from the control panel, Garrus changed his pistol to armor piercing rounds. Taking a turn behind some open crates, Garrus dived immediately to the side, managing to get behind cover as assault rifle rounds started to impact the crate that he was using as cover. Activating his tactical camouflage once again, Garrus popped out of cover to the left of the crate. Aiming at the head of the mercenary, Garrus opened fire with his pistol.

Taking fast successive shots to his helmet, the mercenary took cover just as one round shattered the visor of his helmet. Removing the helmet from his person, the mercenary popped out of cover, only to see the barrel of the pistol in front of his shocked face. 'Fuck.' Being the last thing that he thought before everything went black.

Taking the assault rifle, an M-15 Vindicator, from the dead mercenary, Garrus started to move towards the main office of the warehouse. 'Why hasn't C-Sec swarmed the place yet?! It has been ten minutes already since I made the call. Is it possible that someone intercepted it? Well no time to dwell on that, I have to save the information on the mainframe for a more deep investigation.' Just as Garrus took another turn between the crates, the lights of the warehouse turned on, and with them, shots towards his general direction started to rain on him from behind.

Taking cover once again, Garrus took the opportunity to send another message to C-Sec before opening fire on the approaching mercenaries. Shooting multiple bursts of three rounds towards a nearby mercenary, Garrus managed to take him out before having to reload his Vindicator.

'Damn, I only have one more thermal clip with me, and the others haven't cooled down yet. Now would be a good time for some reinforcements.' Garrus thought as he retreated towards another crates behind him. All the way there shooting suppressive fire to give himself some time. Shooting at the incoming mercenaries, Garrus managed to take the shields of one down before the rifle expelled the thermal clip because of overheating. 'Damn, I guess I'm done for.' Garrus thought angrily.

Just as Garrus was losing hope of getting out of the warehouse alive, sirens started to be heard outside, and with it, the sound of a few gunships in the air.

"Everyone inside surrender! This is C-Sec, and we got you surrounded! You have one minute to exit and drop your weapons, or we will use lethal force!" Someone outside shouted through a megaphone.

"Eben! You said that communications was jammed inside this warehouse."

"And they were. The jammer must have malfunctioned when the systems were overloaded"

"Um, boss? What do we do?"

"We will have to surrender, we are outgunned here, and I don't want to die just yet."

Outside C-Sec was preparing itself to enter the warehouse when the front gate of the warehouse opened. Once the gate was open, the remaining mercenaries threw their weapons and put their hands above their heads. C-Sec acted immediately and started arresting them while other officers secured the crime zone.

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"What do you mean that there's not enough evidence to arrest Sardart Niral? Surely all the evidence needed is in that warehouse." Garrus said to his boss inside C-Sec headquarters.

"That's the problem, Detective, the mainframe on the warehouse was destroyed during your small firefight. And the evidence that you provided only proves that the shipments were indeed contraband. Through all the information that you provided, there's no mention of

Niral besides the fact that he ordered one of those crates to be delivered to him on Illium." Garrus' boss explained.

"Surely that's enough to at least detain and interrogate him."

"I'm afraid not, Niral being a citizen of Illium complicates things for us. Seeing as Illium is part of the Terminus Systems and there's not enough evidence to prove that he is involved in the black market here on the Citadel, we will have to pass the case on him to the authorities on Illium."

"You have to be kidding me. Then how do you explain why all those crates full of black market merchandise were here on the Citadel?"

"I know what you are getting at, Garrus, and I agree with you in there, but Citadel law clearly states that, unless there's enough evidence to prove that someone with a foreign citizenship is involved strongly with some type of crime here on the Citadel, we are to report him or her to whatever planet, moon, or station authorities that have jurisdiction over him or her." Seeing Garrus' angry expression at the situation, he decided to try a different approach with his friend, "Look Garrus, I know that you have been working on Niral's case for months now, and I also know how many times you almost got him only for him to escape somehow. But why don't you take a pair of weeks off duty? You have been working a lot, even going as far as overextending yourself."

Managing to calm his nerves down, Garrus nodded and took off from his boss' office. 'It is incredible how low the system has fallen. We all know that the investigation conducted by the authorities on Illium will find nothing on Niral, and then we are back to square one.' Garrus thought as he passed through a bridge overlooking part of the city. The lights of the skyscrapers, cars and many other things providing a light show in the middle of the night.

Sighting in tiredness, Garrus was about to leave when he heard someone.

"Stress problems?" A Human nearby asked him.

"You could say that." Garrus replied, not interested in small talk for the moment.

"I assume that it has something to do with your job. Right? Detective."

Rising an eyebrow, Garrus asked, "How do you know that I'm a detective?"

"Because your posture and awareness tells me that. After all, I'm a Detective myself back where I live."

"I see. Then what are you doing all the way over here? Won't the police force need you?"

"I'm taking a vacation right now. Some friend mentioned that the Citadel was a sight worth visiting, so I took a ride here, and boy were they not kidding about it."

"Yea, the Citadel is definitely something that one has to see, especially at this time of the night."

"Well, nice talking to you, Detective. Oh, and sometimes you got to ignore all the red tape blocking your way in order to achieve your goals while working for justice. Who knows, while some may see it as a criminal's path, other may see it as a defender of good's path."

"What?" Garrus asked, confused at the statement from the man.

"Just some advice, I suppose." And with that, the mystery man took off into the night.

'What a strange individual. A criminal's path being the correct one once in a while? Well I suppose that that could be true sometimes, but that is really rare to happen.' Garrus thought as he walked towards his apartment.

Some streets away from the bridge, the mysterious Human activated the communicator on his ear before saying, "The seed has been planted. Give it a few days and the time to recruit him will come." And with that the stranger took towards the airlock. Once on his sky-car and hermetically closing the vehicle, the stranger accelerated out of the Citadel's atmosphere, activating the invisibility mode in the process, his destination being the docking bay of an invisible prowler keeping watch on the gigantic station.

****Age of Resurrection, Loyalist Covenant Calendar, Unknown System inside Citadel Space, Aboard CSO-Class Super Carrier **_**Vengeance Coming**_**.**

"Supreme Commander, we have arrived at the system. Lectures show no signs of activity."

"Good. Operator tell the troops to start setting up a base in the moon orbiting the second planet. Send Scout and Ranger teams towards the surface of the planet." Jul 'Mdama ordered as he watched the holographic representation of said planet and moon.

"Understood. The teams have been notified."

"Supreme Commander, there's an energy signature coming from the planet's surface. It appears to be some kind of beacon."

Before Jul could respond to that, the doors to the bridge opened. The Grand Hierarch of Vengeance entered the bridge as everyone present bowed at his presence.

"Rise and continue with your duties. Supreme Commander, what is our status?" Vengeance said.

"We are starting to set up a base on the moon of the second planet and teams have been sent to the planet to scout the surface. We also found an energy signature coming from the south regions of this continent." Jul informed just as the holographic image of the planet zoomed in on the beacon's coordinates. Using the potent scanners of the ship, the hologram showed that the energy came from a pillar like structure in the middle of a forest. Strange symbols decorated its surface as well as similar protuberances coming from the soil

nearby.

Seeing this, Vengeance's eyes shot wide open before he regained his composure. "Supreme Commander, secure that area and set up a camp around the artifact. Send teams to start the extraction of the artifact, but do not damage it in any way possible under any circumstances. Operator, prepare my ship, I'll be going down there personally."

"Your highness. Do you think it wise to go down there before our scouts secure the zone?"

"Supreme Commander, just do as I say. An elite guard will be accompanying me down there. Make sure to secure the system, any ship that does not belong to our cause is to be destroyed. If it is one of this Citadel Government or Terminus Systems, capture it and secure all the information within it."

"Yes, your highness, It'll be done as you say."

With that, Vengeance exited the bridge, his destination being the hangar. 'What secrets could this new race bring to us?' Vengeance thought as he analyzed the image of the relic found on the planet.

****A/N: And another chapter is done. Like I said above, this chapter signifies the start of a new arc and the events of Mass Effect 1 will start to take place soon. Though don't worry I won't be making them completely cannon because it wouldn't fit with the flow that this story is taking.****

****Also, expect to see more of CERBERUS and the SPECTRES operations from now on, as well as more activity from the now Loyalist Covenant and Sovereign's Geth. Though don't expect this last two to become sudden allies with equal terms and standings, after all their ideologies are different. If they do something alongside the other is because each one has their own agenda and is most provably using the other faction as a tool to achieve it.****

****Now please review this story, what do you think of it and what suggestions you people have.****

****Until next time!****

13. First Contact, Once Again?

****The Next Great Journey****

****A/N: And I'm back with a new chapter. Thanks again to everyone who clicked favorite or follow and also to the ones that took the time to post a review.****

****IMPORTANT NOTICE #1: I want to thank Lord Izanagi for Beta read the chapter for all my grammatical errors, Thank you very much.****

****IMPORTANT NOTICE#2: I changed the format of the Codex of the story, I think that it will be easier to read and understand it in this new version. So if you want to check it out go ahead. :P It has been**

updated to current events in the story.**

Now onto the chapter.

"Speaking"

'Thoughts'

[Radio Communications, Ground forces-Ground forces, and Ship-Ship]

{Ground to Ship Communications}

Flash back of previous chapter(s)

Flash Back

_ 'Messages on Screen' _

Sound Effects

Line Break just shows a change of scenery.

Disclaimer: I don't own Halo or Mass Effect, both belong to their respective owners.

Chapter 13: First Contact, Once Again?

October 28, 2574, 2230 Hours, Systems Alliance Calendar, Horsehead Nebula, Unknown System, Cronos Station.

The vibrant blue-red giant star, one of, if not the only, worthy sight in the entire system. Producing a godly show of dominance on its surface; the different compounds and elements fighting to gain control over of the star. The deciding factor being the color of their master. Some think of this battle as a representation of good and evil, blue and red respectively, on the galaxy. While that would be a valid analogy, others saw it as a fight between two personalities, that of pacifist and that of anarchists, once again blue and red respectively.

A lone station surrounded by barely two dozen ships orbited the lone star of the system. The star's majesty available for everyone close to a window to see during the day hours inside the station. But the star wasn't just for show to the inhabitants of the station, its other function was that of providing a source of light to a dark room like observatory. In said room, a lone man sat in a chair, a cigarette and a data-pad in each hand.

'Interesting. It looks like all the recruitments were successful. This will definitely help accelerate CERBERUS' plans.' T.I.M. thought as he inhaled the smoke of his cigar. Looking at a holographic terminal, T.I.M. read the many reports sent to him by the many prowlers inside Citadel Space. One report in particular interested him, apparently one of the many probes sent to systems between relays had detected Slip-space activity. Sending the report to one of the many AIs of the station, T.I.M. waited for the results. Seconds later, the report returned to him. Looking at it once, T.I.M. pressed a button on his chair.

"Put Lieutenant Commander Smith on the line." T.I.M. said through an intercom.

Waiting a few seconds, a holographic screen appeared in front of him, the face of Lieutenant Commander Smith regarding him with respect and awaiting for his orders.

"Lieutenant Commander Smith, how's your crew?"

"Ready and awaiting orders, sir."

"Good to hear that. I got a new assignment for GHOST team. A reconnaissance and intelligence mission, to be exact. I'll be sending the details after this transmission is finished."

"Understood, I'll notify the team right away."

"One more thing, Lieutenant Commander. This mission can't fail in any way, shape, and/or form. Do not take any decisions outside the mission parameters without consulting me first. Understood?"

"Yes sir."

With that, T.I.M. closed the line. Sending the coordinates with the details of the mission, T.I.M. sent a message requesting a meeting to the head of ONI, the Arbiter, and Lord Hood. After that was done, T.I.M. continued watching the spectacle that the star provided while lighting another cigarette.

****Age of Resurrection, Loyalist Covenant Calendar, Unknown System inside Citadel Space, Phantom Drop-Ship, In Route to Area of Interest.****

The Prophet of Vengeance watched the holographic projection of the alien relic that resided within the jungle that surrounded the camp site set up by his forces. On the hologram, he watched as a pair of Ranger teams with sniper support secured the area nearby, none of them approaching the relic that had spiked his interest.

[Your Highness, we are approaching the landing zone. Your escort is already waiting with a transport for you.] The pilot of the Phantom said through the intercom.

"Good, once we land I want you to have the Phantom ready for departure once I return." Vengeance responded distractedly. His interest was being focused on the alien relic, his watchful eyes trying to solve all of its mysteries through the hologram.

Minutes later, the Phantom landed. Its side doors opened up, letting Vengeance exit the Phantom in his gravitational throne. Once on the ground, a Jiralhanae approached him, bowing at Vengeance's presence. Standing up, the Jiralhanae guided Vengeance to a troop transport vehicle known as Shadow. Once inside, the Shadow speeded through the jungle. The vegetation and humidity of it made Vengeance feel a bit exhausted because of the unusual type of habitat for his species.

Arriving at the now active excavation site, Vengeance and the Jiralhanae climbed down from the Shadow. Passing the Ranger teams, the Jiralhanae and the Sangheili glared at each other, trying to

stablish supremacy over the other's species. Vengeance ignored this, opting instead to approach the now brilliant green-blue crystal like structure in front of him.

"Your Highness, I recommend not to approach. The relic is emitting some strange readings." A Sangheili operating a terminal advised.

"Mind your own business, Ranger. This relic is a sign by the gods themselves, and I intend to find out what is it that they want to tell us." Vengeance said venomously.

"O-of course, Your Highness." the Sangheili said, bowing in fear of being executed right there. Not for nothing, the High Prophet of Vengeance was called as such. He had a reputation of not tolerating any kind of insubordination, and when he did, the minimum of mistakes for your part won you an execution.

Vengeance smiled at himself at seeing the Ranger's reaction. Turning around, Vengeance approached even closer to the relic. The alien structure responded in kind, shining even brighter as Vengeance approached. The relic keep shining brighter and brighter until it suddenly stopped shining at all. Vengeance looked curiously at the new development, but then his eyes widened as the relic lit up again as an energy lighting coming from within the relic grabbed him.

Pain. Pain was the only word that could describe Vengeance's current state. Though that was a slight side effect of what was happening inside Vengeance's mind. Images of a great civilization that had reached galactic conquest flashed through his mind. Only to be replaced by the images of the same cities and planets burning to the ground, while enormous fleets fought in space. The pitch black ships like parasites leaving a trail of destruction on every city, planet, and system that they stepped in. The civilization that left the beacon of sorts being pushed back planet by planet in a desperate fight for survival.

While Vengeance was being held hostage by the alien relic, the rest of the Loyalist Covenant members moved chaotically, looking for a way to neutralize the energy coming from the relic and liberate their leader from its grasp.

Suddenly, the energy holding Vengeance disappeared back inside the relic, dropping Vengeance back in his gravitational throne. Lucky for him, the fall wasn't that big, leaving him with only slight pain and a big headache.

"Your Highness! Are you alright?"

"Of course I am, you moron!" Vengeance replied brusquely, "Prepare a transport to take me back to my ship." He ordered, "And Ranger. I want your men to transport this relic aboard my ship. Any sign of activity from it, and you are to notify me immediately. Fail to do so, and this will be your last assignment."

With that, Vengeance moved away from the relic in order to let the Ranger team do their work. 'What were those things that I saw? Who was the master of such strange and parasitic ships? And most importantly, what does that message mean, and how can I use it?'

Vengeance thought to himself.

****Close to Starting the Next Cycle, Reapers' Calendar, The Sea of Storms System.****

In one of the most desolate and uninhabited systems in the galaxy, a fleet of hundreds of ships was guarding a single station floating in the middle of space. Between the insect like shaped ships, an octopus in the form of a ship floated close to the station. Suddenly a red like eye lit up, sending a single command to various ships on the fleet.

[Move to the given coordinates, a new development has arisen.]
Sovereign said as he powered his FTL drive alongside the Heretic Geth ships.

'One of the beacons left by those before this current cycle's species has been activated. The time to gain new agents has come.' Sovereign thought to himself before he, alongside the other ships, accelerated out of the system at incredible speeds towards the closest relay.

****October 30, 2574, 7010 Hours, Systems Alliance Calendar, Unexplored System, CERBERUS Stealth Prowler **_**Eagle Eye**_**, Bridge.****

Lieutenant Commander Smith sat on his command chair. Screens and holograms providing the oncoming data of the system that they had just recently arrived.

"Lieutenant Darius, what's our status?" Smith asked.

"All systems are operational and the stealth cloak is active. Shields are at hundred percent and weapons are at thirty percent, Lieutenant Commander." Darius responded.

"Good, keep it that way, Lieutenant. Sensors, what can you tell me about the system?"

"Sir, the system is swarmed with Loyalist Covenant activity. We have the standard patrol groups at the edge and equator of the system. Although most of their fleet is concentrated around the second planet and its moon. Also, there is a faint signal coming from the second planet, I can't tell what it is from this distance, we'll have to move closer in order to identify it." The person in charge of the ship's sensors responded.

"Understood. Pilot, get us close to the planet. I want a topographical scan of the planet ASAP. Communications, keep monitoring Loyalist Covenant channels."

"Yes sir!" The crew of the bridge responded.

Moving to the T.H.P., (Tactical Holographic Projector), Lieutenant Commander Smith observed the position that the Loyalist ships had assumed. Putting identification tags on priority targets, Smith managed to identify a total of thirty CSO-Class Supercarriers, seventy CAS-Class Assault Carriers, eighty CCS-Class Battlecruisers, and fifty CPV-Class Heavy Destroyers. 'What could the Loyalist want with this system? Especially with the amount of firepower that they

have here? Are they planning some kind of invasion, or perhaps it's something more sinister?' Smith wondered to himself.

"Sir! We have detected the source of the energy signature. It appears that the Loyalist deployed a spire tower in one of the southern continents of the planet. Though that's not all, geological and thermal scans show remnants of some kind of ancient city." The one in charge of sensors said.

"Ancient city? How ancient are we talking about, crewman?" Smith asked as he visualized the remnants of the city via the T.H.P.

"The carbon-14 dating test***** put it at, at least, fifty thousand to fifty-three thousand years in the past since it was destroyed."

"It appears that we found a Prothean city." Smith mumbled to himself, "Pilot, get us close to the spire's signal, keep us cloaked at all times. Communications, send GHOST team to the bridge."

Yes sir!" The crew responded.

Looking at the T.H.P. Smith could see that the city was buried under at least one kilometer of rock and sand. There also appeared to be a cave system that gave access to the city. Moving the image to the spire's position, Smith saw that besides the standard electromagnetic shield that surrounded the spire, there were multiple turrets, tanks, light vehicles, and banshees patrolling the perimeter. 'Looks like they want to hide something. The question is, what?' Smith wondered to himself. Minutes later, the door to the bridge opened and with it the four members of GHOST team entered the bridge.

"Sir!" The four soldiers saluted.

"At ease. GHOST team, the following operation comes straight up from the boss. And for that reason we can't let this operation fail in any way, shape or form. Understood?"

"Sir, yes sir!"

"Good, now this is a strictly RECON operation. Your job here would be to only observe and record data." Smith said as he signaled GHOST team to look at the T.H.P., "Gunnery Sergeant, you and your team will infiltrate the spire's electromagnetic field area, there's a cliff from which you'll be able to observe everything happening on the spire. Command wants you to record everything that happens and also to keep our presence hidden one hundred percent. That means that your team is NOT to engage the enemy in any way or form unless they attack you first. Exposure of our presence will equal to failure of the operation and an extraction will be executed immediately."

"Understood, sir. What's our entry point?" Tomson asked.

"Because of the electromagnetic field surrounding the spire, we'll have to deploy you by parachute. One of our modified stealth Phantoms will deploy you midair. Because of the presence of Banshee patrols you'll have to deploy the parachute after you pass the electromagnetic field so they don't detect you."

"What about our weapons, and armor systems? Won't they'll be affected by the EMP?"

"Normally, yes. But that's why you are going to engineering first. They'll install a chip in your armors and weapons so that they can be restored to normal state after some minutes after the entry.

"Noted, sir." Tomson responded.

"Be ready for deployment in fifteen minutes. You are dismissed."

Saluting once again, GHOST team moved to engineering. A few minutes later, the four operatives arrived at their destination. Noticing them, one of the chiefs in charge of engineering guided them to a room full of terminals and some work tables. The chief informed them of the process to reset their armor and weapons once they were on the other side of the barrier.

Once that was done, the four teammates moved to the small hangar of the prowler.

"Excited about our deployment conditions, Yeg?" Tomson asked his second in command and friend.

The Kig-Yar looked at Tomson with a critical eye, "Of course I do. It has been a long time since I have experienced something as interesting as this deployment will be."

"I suppose that you find primitive methods of doing things more interesting?" Reth asked curiously.

"Don't get me wrong, I like technology and how much easier it makes our jobs. But, it just doesn't feel the same as interacting more directly with the elements. There hasn't been a use for the parachute in actual combat for my species in centuries, maybe millennia. To be able to go back to the old times, even if it is momentarily, is refreshing in a way." Yeg answered.

"I suppose that that's a valid point." Tomson coincided.

G-4 looked at his teammates curiously and perplexed. He couldn't understand completely the excitement that his companions were talking about, but he could understand the need to go back to using their senses in extreme situation, like flying, for them that is. He wasn't even planning on using a parachute, being able to fly by himself being the reason, but he would still carry one just in case.

Arriving at the hangar of the prowler, GHOST team got in the modified stealth Phantom. Its modifications allowing the Phantom to be able to cloak itself at the cost of less armor and weaponry, though its capabilities to fly in outer space were still present. Once everyone boarded the drop-ship and settled down, the pilot activated the anti gravity thrusters. Lifting the Phantom carefully, the pilot waited until getting the green light from the bridge. The hangar doors opened fully and with it the green light for departure was given.

The Phantom zoomed immediately towards the spire's position,

activating its cloak. The drop-ship disappeared from every visible spectrum.

{It appears that there's a big storm coming our way, _Eagle Eye_, do I proceed with the mission?} The pilot of the Phantom asked.

{Affirmative. The mission is still a go. Just don't get hit by the lighting.}

[GHOST team, there's a storm coming our way. Your insertion point will be a bit turbulent.] The pilot said through the Phantom's speakers.

[Noted. Thanks for the update.] Tomson responded, "Alright, this complicates things a bit. Just make sure to deploy the parachute at the correct elevation and everything will be fine."

The other members of GHOST team nodded at that before returning to check their weapons. This being a RECON mission, Yeg brought with him his trusted Beam Rifle alongside a Plasma pistol. Reth decided to bring a T52 SAR- Focus Rifle and a pair of Plasma pistols. G-4 brought his trusted pair of Needlers alongside the equipment to send the recording signal to the prowler. Finally, Tomson brought a BR55HB SR Silenced Battle Rifle and an SRS99 Sniper Rifle with him.

[Sixty seconds to the dropping point, over] The pilot informed.

"Alright, GHOST team prepare for deployment. Yeg, you go first. Reth you go afterwards and then G-4." Seeing the nods of approval, Tomson checked his parachute once again.

The Phantom came to a stop above the EMP dome surrounding the spire with Covenant air traffic passing close to the unnoticed cloaked Phantom. Once there was a window of opportunity, the pilot opened the gravitational lift hatch on the Phantom's floor. Once open, each member of GHOST team jumped one after the other through their circular exit. Closing the hatch, the pilot speeded back towards the prowler to refuel the drop-ship, having to use much of its energy to maintain the cloak active at all times, the fuel reserves dropped considerably in order to compensate for the extra use of energy.

Outside, the storm roared with the force of a small hurricane. The members of GHOST team, now on a free fall ready to pass through the EMP energy field, adjusted their trajectory using the still functioning visors of their helmets. Making a signal to the rest of his team, Tomson alongside his companions dived vertically through the air, cutting through the storm's wind like arrows towards their target.

G-4 adjusted his body and wings in order to increase his speed, the natural aerodynamic form that his species had giving him more control and speed of his movements than his companions. Once crossing the EMP barrier, G-4 watched as his helmet systems deactivated. Spreading his wings, he used them to sky glide, noticing that his wings were too heavy to fly because of the water. Once he started to visualize the cups of the trees, G-4 activated his parachute, immediately feeling the slight pull upwards and to the side because of the wind.

Looking at his surroundings, G-4 identified another three more parachutes opening. The parachute stuck between some tree branches. G-4 had to maneuver his body towards a nearby tree and stick to it. Cutting the cables holding the parachute to the bag that he had, G-4 jumped to the ground, using his wings to decelerate his fall.

Once on the ground, G-4 started the process of reactivating the systems of his weapons, armor, and other gadgets that he had with himself. Minutes later, the systems of all his electronic apparatus rebooted completely.

[G-4 here. I made it to the LZ. Anyone copy?] He said through his communicator.

[G...that you?...eg hereâ€|there appearsâ€|be staticâ€|use of the stormâ€|at's your posâ€|on?] G-4 heard through the radio alongside static.

Calibrating the signal's power, G-4 responded, [Yeg, I heard you. The storm appears to be interfering with our coms, I'm sending you my coordinates. Have you heard of the others?]

[Understood, I'm moving towardsâ€|location. I haven'tâ€|rom the others. They couâ€|rebooting their systems.] Yeg responded, this time with less interference.

[Understood. I'll try to contact them. G-4 out.]

Taking cover under the leaves of the trees, G-4 took out a signal amplifier alongside a radar. Connecting both apparatus after rebooting them, G-4 send a radio signal, using the radar to locate the receptors from his teammates radios. He located Yeg's signal, seeing that he was minutes away from his position. Expanding the radius of the signal, G-4 located the signals of Reth and Francis, both of them being some twenty minutes away from their position. With the storm as it was, it was pointless to contact them via radio, there would be much interference and the Loyalist could detect them.

Hearing some movement nearby, G-4 checked the radar, seeing that it was Yeg who was approaching. Turning the devices off, G-4 packed them and moved towards Yeg.

[We should move to the objective point. Both Reth and Francis are twenty minutes from our position and one click closer to the objective. Seeing as it is futile to use radio at such distances with this storm, they'll be going towards the objective.] G-4 said to the now visual Yeg.

"In that case, let's go. Are your wings dry enough to fly a bit?" Yeg asked.

[Affirmative. Why do you ask?]

"There would be less chances of being detected if we move through the branches of the trees. And we also get a better vision in case there are some ground patrols around here."

Nodding in acknowledgment, both G-4 and Yeg climbed to the branch of

a tree. Yeg, using his agility, jumped from a branch to another branch in another tree, moving at a steady pace. G-4 used his wings to move from branches between the trees, keeping a steady pace with Yeg. Both of them continued moving like this for minutes; the storm kept as ferocious as it was when it started, if not even more.

Stopping on their tracks, both G-4 and Yeg watched as a Loyalist patrol made its way below them. The Jiralhanae and the three Unggoys accompanying him being alert at their surroundings in this alien planet that they were currently on. The Jiralhanae stopped suddenly, having smelt something on the air. Back up on the tree, G-4 and Yeg aimed their weapons at the patrol below them, carefully and stealthily moving to another branch at the same time.

The Jiralhanae looked upwards, noticing the moving branches between the trees, the Jiralhanae smelled the air one more time. The sudden yelp of an Unggoy distracted him, looking at the direction of the yelp, the Jiralhanae saw as one of the local animals attacked the three scared Unggoys. The Jiralhanae growled in annoyance before shooting at the animal with his weapon. Picking up the corpse, he and the three Unggoys went back towards the camp.

Back up on the trees, G-4 and Yeg relaxed their bodies before moving ahead towards their objective.

****XXXXX****

Meanwhile some meters ahead of G-4 and Yeg, Francis and Reth made their way to the cliff through the ground. Both of them alert, their weapons at the ready in case someone decided to shoot at them. The silence that was between them only being interrupted by the lighting, thunder and heavy rain of the storm. Their footsteps making ****CLAP**** like sounds on the wet terrain.

"Hey Francis, how close are we from the cliff?" Reth asked, as he kept his Focus Rifle ready for use.

"Ten minutes from our position, five if we sprint." Francis responded.

"Do you think that G-4 and Yeg are there already?"

"Doubt it, they made it to the LZ, though they should be some ten to twenty minutes behind us."

Once again, silence descended upon both of them. The rain falling at an even more aggressive speed. Looking upwards, they saw as a Banshee loosed control and passed through the EMP barrier because of the wind's force. The Banshee descended in an uncontrolled flight path towards the ground. Losing sight of it behind the trees, both teammates kept moving ahead, not another word being exchanged between them for the rest of their travel.

Ten minutes later, both of them arrived at their destination point. Surveilling the nearby area and setting up a few lasers around the perimeter that will alert them if someone gets inside their established perimeter. Moving behind some rock formations, Francis and Reth set up their sniper rifles on the cliff, a cave of sort giving them cover from the rain as well as visual cover from someone

coming from behind them.

[Francis, Reth do you copy? Yeg here alongside G-4, we have arrived at the objective site. Over.] Both, Francis and Reth heard through the radio.

[Yeg, G-4! Glad to hear that you two are alright. Francis and I are on the other side of the big rock, rendezvous with us here.] Reth responded.

[We are on our way.] Yeg said.

Once their other two teammates arrived, both Francis and Reth helped G-4 set up the transmission and recording equipment. Once the antenna was set up and connected wirelessly to the sniper rifles' scopes, G-4 started to connect the signal to the Prowler.

[We are transmitting.] G-4 said.

[Alright people, operation STALKER commences now.] Francis said with some humor.

****October 30, 2574, 9030 Hours, Systems Alliance Calendar, Unexplored Planet, CERBERUS Stealth Prowler **_**Eagle Eye**_**, Bridge.****

"How's the operation going, Lieutenant Darius?" Smith asked to his systems and weapons officer.

"GHOST team is on the target, they are transmitting as we speak. Do you want me to put it on the T.H.P.?"

"Affirmative, Lieutenant."

Moving towards the T.H.P., Smith watched as the reports of the probes sent to the abandoned city disappeared to be replaced with the image of a Spire tower, the defenses of the perimeter, and the control center of the spire. The image on the perimeter showed the standard Loyalist formations, turrets, tanks and light vehicles guarding the main entryways to their camp, while ambush teams guarded the indirect routes. Looking at the image that was overlooking all the area in general, Smith spotted various Phantoms and Spirits landing at the top of the spire, only to return to their ships with some cargo.

"Communications, inform GHOST team to zoom in on those transports. I want to know what it is that they are carrying back to their ships."

The image looking at the general area zoomed in on a Sprit transport that was exiting the EMP zone through a small gape. Between its arms, a strange, long pillar like crystal structure with alien symbols was being carried to one of the ships on space. Smith returned the recording and paused it at the alien structure's image. Looking at it from this angle, he couldn't identify what exactly it was, but he deduced that it was important enough to draw the Loyalists' attention.

"Sir. GHOST team has found something interesting. I'm zooming in on that particular image." Communications announced.

On the T.H.P. the image of the Spirit banished to be replaced by a live video on the base of the spire. On the gap between the ground and the spire, a structure stud on the middle. Using the potent gravitational lifts of the spire, the structure was pulled slowly from the ground, though it appeared that it was almost done as the process was increasing speed. Smith zoomed even more on the alien structure before pausing as realization crossed his face. 'It's a Prothean beacon! This changes things.'

"Communications! Contact T.I.M. immediately." Smith ordered.

"Understâ€|"

"Sir! We have new contacts entering the system." Lieutenant Darius said, interrupting what communications was saying in the process.

"More Loyalist ships?" Smith asked.

"Negative. Signatures of entry match FTL signals of Citadel-like ships."

"Sir! GHOST team is reporting new activity on the spire. They are requesting communication with you."

"Lieutenant Darius, put the new contacts and Loyalist ships on the T.H.P., make sure that one of our probes records the encounter. Communications, put GHOST team on the line."

The T.H.P. images changed to that of outer space, using a probe on the outer edge of the system to see the events that were about to unfold in front of themselves. Meanwhile, the helmet of Gunnery Sergeant Tomson appeared in a nearby terminal.

"What's the situation, Gunnery Sergeant?" Smith asked.

[Sir, the structure that was being excavated is being prepared for extraction. But that's not all, Jul 'Mdama is down there supervising the extraction. Sir, our team can take him down now, we just need confirmation.] Tomson explained.

Smith swore under his breath, 'This is bad timing.' He thought before addressing the Sergeant, "Negative, Gunnery Sergeant. Get your team to the extraction zone immediately."

[But sir, UNSC and ONI regulations tagged Jul 'Mdama as an 'Eliminate on Sight' target.] Tomson pressed on.

"Negative Sergeant. You do that and this mission is a failure, and with two possible hostile fleets in the system, we can't afford any failures. Extract your team Sergeant, Smith out." With that Smith cut the transmission and focused his attention on the T.H.P.

****Age of Resurrection, Loyalist Covenant Calendar, Unknown System inside Citadel Space, CSO-Class Super Carrier **_**Vengeance Coming**_**, Bridge.****

Jul 'Mdama stormed through the bridge of his ship. As soon as he

heard that an unknown fleet had entered the system, he took the first Phantom back to the Carrier in order to ascertain the situation. Taking his place on the command chair, Jul looked at various terminal showing the information coming from the enemy fleet.

"What's our status?" Jul asked.

"Fleet Master, the enemy ships are maintaining course to our perimeter defenses on the system. Our ships there have their weapons ready to fire as soon as you give the word."

"Good, tell them to coordinate fire. We shall take as many enemy ships as we can out of the fight in the first strike."

"Fleet Master, incoming transmission from the Hierarch. Patching it through."

Looking at another terminal close to his command chair, Jul looked as the High Prophet of Vengeance appeared on the screen, a serious and tired expression on his face.

[Fleet Master, order the ships to retreat back to our controlled space as soon as the relic is aboard the ship.] Vengeance said.

"With all due respect, Your Highness, I suggest that we take these unknowns out before they reveal our position to nearby ships or the Alliance. We outnumber them, this would be no more than a small skirmish." Jul said.

[That may be, Fleet Master, but we can't risk the relic's security. Besides, this system is of no use to us any more, I already ordered the destruction of our base on the moon. Order the Fleet to retreat as soon as the relic is aboard.]

"Understood, Your Highness." Jul coincided.

With that, Vengeance disconnected the transmission. Jul turned back to the holographic projection of the battlefield, the enemy ships were approaching at a slow but steady pace towards the perimeter of his kill zone. He also noticed that their largest ship was barely the size of one of his destroyers. 'It looks like we are back to the beginning of the Great War.'

"Communications, send the following coordinates to all the ships on the fleet. Tell them to await my command to leave this pitiful system, and also tell them to open fire at will. Make sure that we destroy all if not most of them before leaving."

"Yes, Fleet Master."

****October 30, 2574, 9054 Hours, Systems Alliance Calendar, Unexplored Planet, CERBERUS Stealth Probe.****

Outside in the middle of space, a single probe orbited the system, recording everything that happened for further analysis. Focusing its recording glass, the probe zoomed in on the Covenant Loyalists ships and the now identified Geth ships plus the unknown ship.

The Geth ships plus the unknown ship approached the standing and

waiting Covenant ones. Neither side making any signs of hostility towards each other. Suddenly, hundreds of plasma torpedoes were fired at the Geth fleet. The Geth ships responded in kind, firing their disruptor missiles in order to intercept the oncoming barrage of plasma. The intercepting maneuver worked, but sadly many plasma torpedoes kept going towards their designated targets.

The barrage of plasma crashed against the kinetic barriers of the Geth ships, destroying the barriers in a single wave so the next oncoming wave could deliver the final blow. The Geth ships dispersed from the trajectory of the second wave of plasma torpedoes, opening fire with their own missiles and accelerator cannons. The plasma torpedoes adjusted their trajectory, each one of them turning to follow their intended target. Once the torpedoes impacted on their targets, the plasma burned through the protective hulls of the ships, making them unmoving husks in the middle of the battlefield.

Meanwhile, the Covenant ships used their pulse lasers to destroy the oncoming barrage of missiles. The few remaining missiles that managed to impact their ships alongside the accelerator cannons rounds were intercepted by the ships' energy shields. Each one of them vibrating a shining orange-yellow color before returning to be invisible to the naked eye. The Destroyers, Battlecruisers, and Assault Carriers fired another wave of plasma torpedoes, this time to the biggest ship of the Geth fleet.

The Unknown ship opened its tentacle like appendages, launching hundreds of drones to intercept the plasma torpedoes, opening fire at the same time with its main cannon, firing two consecutive shots from its magnetohydrodynamic cannon, which is a stream of melted metal going at a fraction of the speed of light. The two consecutive shots hit a Battlecruiser, its shields taking the two hits, turning red before disappearing from visual existence once again.

Seeing the weakened state in which the Battlecruiser's shield were, the Geth ships fired at it with their own accelerator cannons plus missiles. The Battlecruiser tried to dodge the incoming barrage, but even when its pulse lasers alongside the pulse lasers of the other ships managed to destroy many of the incoming missiles, the Battlecruiser still took two accelerator cannon rounds, which managed to deactivate its shields as well as damaging part of its hull. The missiles that survived the onslaught of the pulse lasers retaliated by impacting the damaged Battlecruiser, destroying it effectively in a bright ball of fire and debris which weakened even more the shields of two close ships.

The unknown ship prepared to open fire once again with its primary cannon, only to be hit by an energy projector cannon of an Assault Carrier, successfully making the unknown ship miss its target. The barriers of the unknown ship held the impact of the energy projector for a while, only to succumb at the last moment. The remaining round of the energy cannon impacted the hull of the unknown ship, successfully damaging it enough to cause a breach.

Just as the unknown ship prepared its main weapon to retaliate, hundreds of blue-purple portals appeared in front of the Covenant ships, each ship entering one portal to latter disappear from the system. The unknown ship powered down its weapon. Turning around, the ship alongside the remaining Geth ships entered FTL, successfully

leaving the system.

****October 30, 2574, 1013 Hours, Systems Alliance Calendar, Unexplored Planet, CERBERUS Stealth Prowler **_**Eagle Eye**_**, Bridge.****

"Lieutenant Darius, did you got all that?" Smith asked.

"Affirmative, I'm sending the recording to T.I.M. as we speak." Darius responded.

"Pilot, take us out of the system. Our mission here is over."

"Yes sir." The pilot responded.

Moving to his quarters, Smith couldn't shake the feeling that this was just the beginning of something sinister. 'Who could be the owner of such a ship? A ship which can withstand with its shields almost an entire single hit of an energy projector from an Assault Carrier, a feat that only another Assault Carrier, a Supercarrier, and maybe an Infinity class ship and a Battlecruiser can accomplish. This will surely surprise the high chairs in Arcturus.' Smith thought to himself as he decided to take a rest in his quarters.

****Close to Starting the next Cycle, Reapers Calendar, FTL in route to Unknown Relay.****

'So that's the power that these Covenant Loyalist and Alliance possess. Though they are still remarkably behind technologically than their predecessors. Still, a ship being able to destroy my kinetic barriers and damage my hull in a single hit is remarkable. Offensively, that single weapon of theirs appears to be superior to my main cannon, for now that is. Defensively their ships are weaker than ours but not enough to be a huge problem for them if they battle against us again. Tough, it will be of no importance, my residual essence that I managed to leave on those Covenant Ships will be enough to slowly indoctrinate their leaders and soon enough I, as all my brothers waiting out there, will have access to that technology.'

Those were the thoughts crossing through the mind of Sovereign as he and the Geth ships approached the closest Relay.

****November 1, 2574, 1100 Hours, System Alliance Calendar,***Reincarnation System, Arcturus Station.****

T.I.M., alongside the military and espionage leaders of the Alliance, were currently reunited in one of their meetings once again. Both, the Arbiter Thel Vadam and Lord Admiral Terrance Hood, watched attentively at the video that T.I.M. was currently playing on the holo-projector; meanwhile, Jason Paterson, the head of ONI, looked at the data displayed alongside the video. The video was recorded just a few days ago by the CERBERUS prowler _Eagle Eye_. In it you could see the small skirmish between the Geth ships, the unknown ship, and the Loyalists Covenant ships. Data regarding both fleets was present at the sides, showing the little analysis that the probe had made of the unknown ship as well as the Geth ships.

Once the video finished, both Hood and Thel looked at each other

before glancing at Paterson. The three of them having similar thoughts, looked at T.I.M. in order for him to explain what he knew about the matter. Seeing the inquisitive looks given to him, T.I.M. proceeded to explain his thoughts, theories and conclusions about the matter at hand.

"As you can see, gentlemen, we have a new player on the board. By the design, statistics, and way in which it operates, we can certainly assume that the ship belongs to an entire non-discovered species until now. This unknown ship seems to be allied with Geth forces. This also confirms Admiral Qunu's, of the Battlecruiser Purity of Spirit, suspicions that the Geth fleet that attacked us as well as the Turians, during the first contact scenario, was only a test of our capabilities."

"On what do you base that last conclusion, Tim?" Hood asked curiously.

"Well, for starters, if you analyze the data of the battle during the first contact and compare it with this new data, you will notice that the shields used by the Geth ships are now more resistant to Plasma weaponry than during the first contact skirmish. Also, there is the fact that the Geth have implemented a method to intercept plasma torpedoes without the use of an EMP bomb or missile. While this method is a bit archaic, for lack of a better word, it's still effective. However, this improvement, as small as it may seem, could represent a problem for us in the future if we don't act accordingly."

"What do you suggest, then?" Paterson asked inquisitively.

"That we destroy or neutralize the Geth before they become a problem for us. We can't let the Geth even the playing field with us and with the Citadel fleets already implementing their offensive and defensive systems in this arms race of ours; if we wait and do nothing, we could be looking at a galactic conflict." T.I.M. explained. Taking a small breath he continued with his idea, "Now we can't just send fleets to Citadel Space without risking a war with them, and as such we can't eliminate the Geth before they become a problem, at least not without causing another problem. I suggest to employ sabotage operations on the Geth, but to do that we will need more intel on them before acting."

Patterson looked at T.I.M. and nodded in approval at his reasoning before giving his own input on the matter, "In that case, I suggest that you send a RECON operation to Rannoch. Find any intel about the Geth and this war between them and the Quarians. We know, by the velocity in which they move and operate, that they have a base of operations close to Citadel Space. It is just a matter of finding it in order to send our Fleets and destroy it."

T.I.M. nodded at that before his attention was diverted to the Arbiter, who spoke next.

"While that may resolve the problem of the Geth, we still have to deal with the unknown ship. Regarding the ship, we know next to nothing about it, besides the fact that it could be either as strong as an Infinity-Class ship or a Battlecruiser. Comparing those odds against our ships, that ship could be an annoyance if it proves hostile to us, which is very likely. But against the Citadel forces,

at their current offensive and defensive capabilities, it could take them an entire small fleet in order to destroy that single ship."

"For the moment, there's nothing that we can do besides being alert. But there's also something else that I wanted to show you regarding the unknown ship," T.I.M. clicked a button on the holographic projector. The image changed to that of the ancient city found on the unknown planet, particularly the image of some symbols and images carved in the walls inside some building, "Our archeologist found these indented images one day ago inside one of the bigger buildings. As you can see, the images in the wall highly resemble that of the unknown ship," At that the image in the hologram zoomed-in on a few particular images on the wall, "The archeologist reported that those images, alongside the symbols next to them, could be an alert of some kind, an alert written on those walls some fifty thousand years ago. That, and the fact that the Protheans mysteriously disappeared around that same time frame."

"Add to the suspicions that the Protheans were exterminated or influenced in some way by this same unknown ship's species." Hood finished having picked up the coincidence.

"Correct Admiral," T.I.M. said, "This carvings on the walls adds just one more piece to our puzzle. But that's not all, the studies that we got by analyzing the Relay network have proved that the Protheans had in fact not constructed them. The Uranium-234 dating tests***** placed the construction of the Relays in a timeline of one million to one million and hundred thousand years. We aren't sure yet how these two things are related, but we suspect that the Omega-4 Relay could hold the answers to some of our questions."

"While I admit that our findings on the Relay network alongside the evidence found on the city and the unknown ship seems suspiciously connected in some way, what has the Omega-4 Relay do with all these? Isn't that Relay part of the same network as the others?" Thel asked.

"That's the point, there's no evidence that proves that the Omega-4 Relay is connected with the rest of the network. That, and the fact that its readings are completely off compared to that of other Relays in the network. The only concluding thing that we know so far about it is what Aria told us. That any ship that uses that Relay is never seen again. That in itself has risen many questions, questions that at the moment we can't answer without risking the lives of many."

The three military and espionage leaders of the Alliance looked at each other, each one coming to the same conclusion and plan of action.

"Tim, I want you to keep looking into this puzzle, there's something that we aren't seeing here and I want you to find what that is. If you need any resources, just ask and it's yours." Hood said.

"Alongside that, the original purpose of CERBERUS still stands, but ONI will assist you with our Geth problem and this Unknown ship." Patterson said.

"Finally, I want you to find out if the Citadel knows about this and if so, find out what they are doing about it. And we want you to keep an eye out for any clues regarding the Protheans' fate. Anything that you find send it to us immediately. Meanwhile, we will be preparing and implementing our fleets in case this results to be something big." Thel finished.

"Understood, I'll be sending my report by the end of the month then. Also, it is highly probable that we will use the opportunity to obtain information from the Citadel to make a cyber-attack in the station as the 'terrorist organization' that CERBERUS is." T.I.M. said.

"You have the green light, just keep the damage as minimum as possible and prevent any unnecessary causalities." Hood said.

"Of course, Admiral."

With that said, the four leaders left the meeting room. Each one of them going to prepare themselves and the Alliance for the possible threat that it's approaching. Taking out a data-pad, T.I.M. sent a message to his base of operations, it said:

_ 'Notify Second Lieutenant Kai Leng and Lieutenant Jacob Taylor that they are to prepare for a RECON operation on Rannoch in forty-eight hours. _

_ T.I.M. ' _

****October 30, 2172, 1740 Hours, Citadel Council Calendar, Widow System, Citadel Presidium, Council Chambers****

The Presidium of the Citadel. One of the many places where one could see the economic wealth and technological power of the Citadel and its residents. This is the view that the three Councilors were greeted with every day. Sitting on their personal room inside the Council's chamber, Sparatus activated a holographic projection of the data sent to him by the SPECTRE team sent to Magna Colony a pair of weeks ago.

"Fellow Councilors." Sparatus started, "It has come to my attention some interesting news for lack of a better word." Taking a small breath, Sparatus elaborated, "As you can remember, a few weeks ago I sent a SPECTRE team to Magna Colony in order to investigate the sudden loss of communications with two groups inside the system. The reason that I hadn't shared the report of that operation with any of you was because I wanted to make sure that the facts stated on it were accurate."

"What do you mean, Sparatus? Do you think that our SPECTRES didn't do a good job?" Tevos asked curiously.

"No, no. I assure you, our SPECTRES acted with the utmost efficiency that there is. The problem is the facts stated on the report." With that Sparatus changed the hologram of the colony to a recording video.

On the video you could see as a Turian colonist was being dragged by a pair of Geth units to some spike-like structures. Tevos and Valern watched in horror as said Turian, which was conscious through the

entire ordeal, was prepared to be plugged in on one of the spike-like structures, only for the spike to latter pass through the thorax of the Turian, killing him instantly. The Geth immediately started to plug in some cables on the now dead body. The image zoomed-out, letting the Councilors see similar structures with bodies already on them. But then a pair of the spikes retracted and with them, the bodies of a pair of Turians fell only to stand up again. Their skin turned a darker blue color and their eyes looked lifeless. Sparatus stopped the video and looked at the horror struck expressions of his fellow councilors.

"As you can see, this is one of the reasons I postponed my report this long, I wanted to make sure that what I was seeing was in fact true. Unfortunately, it was true. The scientist that I sent to the scene to inspect the remnants of the base and the spikes that were on the plaza confirmed that to me, the process that the Geth used is similar to that that the Flood uses to turn its victims into one of them, though much slower." Sparatus said.

"But how? How is this possible? The Geth aren't near the technological level required to do something like this." Tevos said while Valern only nodded supporting Tevos' claim.

"That's where my other reason to postpone this meeting takes place. The SPECTRE team sent to the colony spotted an unidentified ship, a ship of approximately two point five kilometers long leaving the surface of the colony." At this, Sparatus changed the hologram to that of a pitch black ship, with many structures like appendages behind its main body. "We aren't sure what the exact capabilities of the ship are nor do we know to who it is that the ship belongs to. What we do know is that the unknown ship is allied with the Geth and that the technology that it uses has some peculiar effects on any person exposed to it for more than twelve hours."

"I am correct in assuming that this technology that you are talking about is the same that the spikes use?" Valern asked.

"Correct. Our scientist reported that the technology is in fact alien to us, but at the same time it is similar in a way."

"What do you mean?" Tevos asked.

"The technology is based on eezo like all of our technology is. But at the same time it is highly advanced to anything that we have."

"You mentioned some side effects happening to the scientist when they were studying the technology. What exactly were those side effects?" Valern asked.

"Memory loss, lack of awareness and coordination, extreme confusion, and hearing of many whispering voices on their heads. At first we thought that it was the stress and trauma because of the events that transpired on Magna Colony, but we found out soon enough that every single individual that studied the technology presented the exact same symptoms and in the same order. I ordered the research teams to abort the operation and to put the remnants in a secure place where no one would be exposed to it."

"This is worrisome. The symptoms show a subconsciously partial mental

control of an individual. Sparatus, you did well in aborting the operation, but we still need to study the technology. We need to come with a way to block the signal coming from the technology so we may be able to study it without any risks." Valern said.

"What about the unknown ship? Do we inform the Alliance about it or do we keep it a secret?" Tevos asked.

"I suggest that we keep it a secret for now. This is a Citadel matter because of its relationship with the Geth. Until the Geth show open aggression against the Alliance, we will inform them of this mysterious ship. For the moment, I suggest that we keep implementing our fleets and that we expand our patrols in the borders." Sparatus said.

"I second that decision." Valern said.

Tevos only nodded at that, too occupied in her own thoughts regarding the resent information trusted to her. 'It appears that the Human saying of 'the calm before the storm' is true after all. And with three hundred years of relative calm I fear of how strong the oncoming storm will be.' She thought.

Shaking her thoughts away, Tevos looked at the window, appreciating the view that the Citadel projected was exactly what she needed in order to calm herself.

****A/N: And here's another chapter completed :D****

*****Now for those that don't know the Carbon-14 dating system can place the age of an object in a timeframe of 50,000 years. The Uranium-234 dating system can place an object's age between 100,000 to 1,200,000 years.****

****Well until the next time :D!****

14. Cyber-Attack

****The Next Great Journey****

****A/N: And I'm back with a new chapter. Thanks again to everyone who clicked favorite or follow and also to the ones that took the time to post a review.****

****IMPORTANT NOTICE #1: I want to thank Lord Izanagi for Beta read the chapter for all my grammatical errors, Thank you very much.****

****IMPORTANT NOTICE#2: The Codex has been updated to current events in the story.****

"Speaking"

'Thoughts'

[Radio Communications, Ground forces-Ground forces, and Ship-Ship]

{Ground-Ship Communications}

Flash back of previous chapter(s)

Flash Back

'Messages on Screen'

****Sound Effects****

Line Break just shows a change of scenery.

****DISCLAIMER: I don't own Halo or Mass Effect; both belong to their respective owners.****

Now onto the chapter.

Chapter 14: Cyber Attack

****November 3, 2574, 1740 Hours, Systems Alliance Calendar, Perseus Veil, Tikkun System, In Route to Rannoch, CERBERUS Prowler
_Early**__**Arrival**_**.****

"I can't believe that we are already on a mission," Jacob Taylor said to his companion, "I mean, it hasn't been a week since we were recruited. I expected to at least be grounded in training for a month or so."

"So you are admitting that you are out of shape, Taylor?" Kai Leng said with a slight smirk.

Since Jacob Taylor and Kai Leng met each other in a CERBERUS facility, less than a week ago, both had reached a mutual respect for each other and had struck a rapidly growing friendship. Being that most of the time they would be covering each other's backs, they both agreed that it was best if they got to know each other, to see if they could trust one another.

"Out of shape?" Jacob said, looking mortified, "With the few augmentations that CERBERUS gave me, plus the training that I kept doing during my retirement, I haven't felt better in years. I'm not SPARTAN standard, yet anyways, but I can easily keep up with you, Kai."

Kai chuckled to himself before replying, "So you say, Jacob." Before his friend could answer that, Kai decided to change the theme of the conversation, "So, what is your opinion so far on our third teammate?"

Adjusting his position more comfortably in the table in which they were seated, Jacob responded objectively, "Miranda? Well, she's persistent, I'll give her that. She is also doing pretty well with all her training, for a novice that is. Though that may be thanks to the pointers that we had given her. I wouldn't say that she's combat ready yet, but she could do well in some RECON operations," Jacob finished before asking curiously, "What's your opinion about her, Kai?"

"The same as yours, though I still don't trust her watching my back in actual combat. Once she manages to complete the simulations with at least a ninety-five success rate, then I will completely trust her

on combat."

"Aren't you giving her really high standards to accomplish? For God's sake Kai, not everyone is a SPARTAN like you."

"That may be so, but that never stopped you from achieving those same standards." Kai pointed out while putting on a serious expression.

"Yes, but the difference is that I'm a veteran, I have experience and decades of training on my side. She has barely started military training a week or so ago," Jacob pointed out to Kai.

"She has potential, and she's a fast learner. Give it a month or three and she will be ready for actual combat missions."

"If you say so," Jacob said.

[Second Lieutenant Leng and Lieutenant Taylor, report to the breach immediately.] A voice through the intercoms of the ship announced.

"Well, that appears to be our end of lunch," Jacob said chuckling.

Both men stood from the table in which they were. Moving towards the breach, both, Kai and Jacob, fell in a comfortable silence. It didn't took them long to arrive at the breach of the small ship. Spotting Captain Foley, both operatives saluted.

"At ease," Foley started as Randal, the ship's AI, activated the T.H.P. In it, the image of a big base close to a cliff appeared. "Gentlemen, as you already know, we are here to extract relevant data regarding the Geth from one of their servers."

Stepping a bit to the side, Foley gave Randal the floor so he could explain the details.

"Your primary objective will be to obtain the information by any means necessary. Though it is recommended to use stealth in the operation. If one Geth sees any of you, then the entire planet will know that we are here," Randal explained.

"What happens if we are spotted?" Kai asked.

"Then you are authorized to engage the enemy if they fire on you first. But your priority is to get the data," Foley said.

"Right. Now, if you look here," Randal said as the image in the T.H.P. changed to that of a heavily fortified line with many AA-guns as well as a big jamming tower, "because of this defensive perimeter, your insertion to the base will be by land. A Pelican will transport you two, alongside a small squadron of Phantom soldiers, to a position close to the base but far away from their AA-Guns range."

"Noted. I'm assuming that we are inserting Randal in the server to download the information?" Jacob asked.

"Negative. You will insert a transmission chip on the mainframe of

the base, from there Randal will be able to connect himself to the mainframe wirelessly. This way we provide a fast exit point for Randal in case he is compromised. Any more questions?" Foley asked. Seeing the stoic expressions on both soldiers, Foley continued, "Then go and suit up. Deployment will be in one hour."

"Sir!" Both Jacob and Kai saluted before leaving the breach.

November 2, 2574, 0900 Hours, Systems Alliance Calendar, Widow System, Citadel Station, Zakera Ward.

"The Citadel, it feels like yesterday was the last time that we were here." Gunnery Sergeant Tomson said to his teammate.

"Indeed. And this time we are here for the exact same reasons," Reth said while chuckling a bit, "Though, this time we are adding a little bit of entertainment."

"How much time is left before we make our big entrance?" Tomson asked as he looked at his watch.

"You mean to start our show of 'terrorism'?" Reth said, remaking the word terrorism with some sarcasm, "Five more minutes and our guys will have their distraction and CERBERUS will be known to the public as we want them to know us."

Francis nodded at that. Both of them were currently hiding on one of the many alleys of the Citadel. Having planted various gas bombs around the area, that were going to leave everyone who breathed it unconscious for some hours, both members of Ghost team waited for the bombs to go off.

Securing their helmets, as well as inspecting their weapons, both operatives readied themselves for some action. A few minutes later, small explosions were heard through a grand part of the Zakera ward. The citizens of the Citadel that were currently on the Zakera ward looked around with confusion, that is, until green smoke started to exit throughout the ventilation systems. The civilians looked curiously at the new development until many stated to cough only to fall unconscious seconds later.

Panic immediately spread like a virus around the civilians. Running in all directions, desperately trying to escape the effects of the unknown gas, none of the panicked civilians noticed, nor heard, a second explosion in the direction in which they were running. Without noticing because of their panicked state, most of the civilians ran straight into the green gas. The few that noticed the gas in the area stopped immediately, only to succumb to the effects of the advancing gas behind them.

[It appears that all the civilians have been neutralized. Reth, start the cyber-attack before C-Sec arrives.] Seeing Reth nod, Tomson changed the frequency on his radio before speaking again, [Ghosts two and four, do you copy? Ghost one here, over.]

[We copy you Ghost one. We are currently entering the Council's chamber, your distraction was a success. Though I'll hurry up if I were you, C-Sec is swarming your area as we speak, over.]

[Noted. Proceed with the objective, Ghost one out.] Changing frequencies once again, Francis contacted Reth, [Reth, what's your status?]

[I'm uploading the virus, I'll be done in a few minutes.]

The sound of various engines caught Francis' attention before he could reply. Looking to the artificial sky that the Citadel offered, Francis spotted three gunships approaching fast towards his position.

[Um, Reth? I don't think that we have a few more minutes. We got three aerial contacts converging on our position.]

[Distract them, I just need more time to be able to make the connection wireless.] Reth replied calmly.

"I knew that I should had bring Yeg with me instead," Tomson murmured to himself.

Looking upwards, Francis noticed that the gunships were almost on top of him. Aiming his MA37-Assault Rifle, Francis opened fire on the incoming gunships.

****November 3, 2574, 1910 Hours, Systems Alliance Calendar, Perseus Veil, Tikkun System, Rannoch, CERBERUS Prowler **_**Early Arrival**_**, Hangar.****

Jacob and Kai walked towards their Pelican, a squad of four Phantom Soldiers following behind them. Having already picked their gear, the six individuals boarded the Pelican, each one of them taking a seat while the pilot started the ignition sequence. Once the thrusters of the Pelican came to life, the Pilot guided the drop-ship so it stayed suspended on the hangar.

A nearby machine grabbed a modified Warthog, designed to carry up to six people at the expense of sacrificing the turret's space. Another set of arms activated the magnetic hooks of the Pelican as the machine secured the Warthog on the Pelican. Once the Warthog was safely secured on the Pelican's tail, the pilot accelerated out of the hangar.

Maneuvering through the rock formations that adorn Rannoch's landscape, the Pelican approached towards its landing zone at a fast and steady pace, unnoticed by the radar systems on the planet. Inside, the four Phantom Soldiers checked their weapons as well as their armor systems. Kai observed them curiously. Being the first time that he had seen any member of the Phantom Initiative on the field, Kai studied their actions to see what their level of skill was. Meanwhile, Jacob checked his M392 DMR rifle, finding it in perfect working condition, he lifted his head to see the Phantom squad ignoring Kai's subtle observations. 'It appears that it is also Kai's first time seeing this guys on action. I wonder, how it is that they operate on the field?' Jacob thought to himself.

[We are approaching the LZ, prepare for deployment in thirty seconds.] The pilot announced. Hearing that, the six individuals stood up, all of them ready for whatever it was that was out there.

The Pelican decelerated, using its thrusters to stabilize itself, the

Pelican deployed the Warthog before opening the cargo bay door and letting its occupants exit the transport. Upon touching land, Kai signaled his team to secure the area. Moving with perfect efficiency, the Phantom squad took cover and surveilled the area with their Carbines, just as the Pelican took off towards the Prowler.

[The area is secure, sir.] One of the Phantoms announced.

[Noted. Everyone, get on the warthog. Jacob, you are driving.] Kai said.

Jacob climbed to the driver's seat just as Kai took the co-driver seat. The four man squad of Phantoms took seats in the back of the Warthog. The Warthog was the cargo variant, a variant used by the Alliance to transport resources to the battlefield or to transport small groups of soldiers, up to six individuals, to specific zones on the battlefield.

Stepping onto the accelerator, Jacob drove the Warthog through the desert like landscape. The Warthog passed through rock formations, vegetation of different sizes and forms, as well as the unexpected fauna of the planet once in a while.

[Alright team, once we arrive at the objective, Echo-1 and Echo-3 will accompany me inside the base, we'll be Alpha team. Jacob, Echo-2 and Echo-4, you'll be Bravo team, your job will be to guard the vehicle and be prepared for extraction. Once we start downloading the information, the Geth will know that we are here. Be prepared for hostile encounter but do not open fire unless fired upon first, understood?] Kai said through the radio.

[Sir! Yes Sir!] The rest of the Warthog occupants said simultaneously.

****XXXXX****

Back in the Prowler, Captain Foley observed the progress of the mission while Randal observed Geth communication channels. Looking at the T.H.P., Foley saw as the Warthog speeded through the desert. It would still take the team a few more minutes to arrive at a visual range of the base, but for now, the progress of the mission was good.

"Sir?" Randal said, "I'm picking up some strange things on the Geth's communication channels."

Looking at the AI's avatar, Foley asked curiously, "What do you mean?"

"Well, all that I have managed to listen to without being detected indicate that the Geth have an isolationist government."

"Well, maybe they have a different meaning for isolation because the Geth attacks on Citadel space indicate to the contrary," Foley pointed out.

"I'm not sure that we are dealing with the same Geth anymore sir. The evidence that I have managed to collect so far, indicates that we may be dealing with a separate faction of the Geth. I'll need more data to be sure of this assumption, but for now, I recommend to be

prepared for possible contact."

"Keep looking into it, I don't want to present myself diplomatically to them only to be shot at."

Randal nodded and disappeared from sight. Foley looked back at the T.H.P., seeing as the RECON team arrived at the base.

****XXXXX****

[Bravo team are you in position?] Kai asked through the radio as he, alongside Echo-1 and Echo-3, overwatched the entrance to the Geth base.

[Affirmative Alpha team. We are ready for extraction as soon as you need us.] Jacob said at the other end of the transmission.

Looking at his two companions, Kai signaled them to move forward. Using the few rocks and tube lines as cover, the three operatives managed to get inside the base without being spotted by the outside cameras. Once inside, the first thing that the three operatives noticed was that they were surrounded by complete darkness. There were very few lights on the hallway, just enough to let you avoid any walls and/or objects in the area.

Aiming his Battle Rifle, Kai moved forward, using the dot sight scope attachment to look for any Geth presence. The Phantoms flanked each side of the door at the end of the corridor, meanwhile Kai touched the big, green holographic circle, opening the door without any problems. As soon as the door opened, both Phantoms entered the room, surveilling it from left to right.

The room was plain and void of anomalies, the pipes from outside kept running through the room, but in a way that permitted anyone to pass easily through the room. Checking the map of the base, which was given to him by Randal before departure, Kai saw that he was one floor up from his intended objective. Having marked a navigation route, Kai alongside his team, moved through a series of hallways. Not once encountering any sign of the Geth.

[Something's wrong here.] Kai said as he and his companions stopped just in front of the door to an elevator.

[Do you think that we are heading into a trap?] Echo-3 asked.

[I'm not sure, but the lack of patrols as well as security systems is alarming.]

[Either way, we can't return now, at least not without the data. Sir, I suggest to keep going ahead, set a few sensors on our trail just in case something or someone is following us.] Echo-1 advised.

[It appears as our best course of action. Echo-1 once we exit the elevator, you start putting up the sensors, keep your camouflage active at all times.] Kai said.

Receiving a nod in response, Kai opened the elevator's door. Once inside, Echo-3 started the elevator's descending. A few seconds later, the elevator's doors opened, revealing two individuals inside.

Moving ahead, the two operatives moved stealthily until arriving at a door that, in contrast to the others, was locked. Kai aimed his Battle Rifle in the way that they had come from, looking for any signs of threats. Meanwhile, Echo-3 started to hack into the door's security systems.

A few seconds later the door lock turned green, and with it, the door opened. The room, like the rest of the base, was flooded with darkness. In the back a big window adorned the wall, and behind it, hundreds, if not thousands of different servers could be seen. Nearby to the window was a terminal, simplistic in design but efficient none the less.

Approaching the terminal, Kai took out the transmission chip. Taking it close to the active holographic terminal, Kai watched as a small lightning bolt moved from the chip to the terminal.

[Transfer is successful, Second Lieutenant. I'm inside the server.] Randal said through the radio.

Kai looked at Echo-3, nodding in his direction. Echo-3 nodded back and turned to guard the door once more. Looking at the systems of his HUD, Kai watched the progress of the data transfer, it was currently at around fourteen percent. 'This could take some time.' Kai thought to himself.

[Bravo team, what's the situation out there?] Kai asked.

[Alpha team, I suggest you to hurry up. Geth forces are entering the base as we speak, strangely enough they aren't carrying any single weapon with them.] Jacob replied at the other end.

[That's strange, has command updated any new information about the Geth?]

[Negative. It appears that they don't know that we are here.] Jacob suggested.

[Sir, one of my sensors has detected something approaching towards our position.] Echo-1 said just as Kai was about to reply to Jacob.

[Noted. Echo-1 rendezvous with Bravo, Echo-3 and I will stay here until the download finishes. Bravo team, be ready for a rushed extraction. Do not call any attention to yourselves until I give the order.]

[Yes sir.], [Noted, ready and waiting for the word.] Both operatives replied respectively.

[Echo-3 ready weapons, as soon as whatever it is that is coming our way enters visual range, open fire. I'll start putting demoâ€™|]

[Cancel that order Second Lieutenant. I have found new data that suggest that the Geth, here on Rannoch, do not pose any sort of threat to us.] Randal interrupted.

Making a sign to Echo-3 to not proceed with his order for the time being, Kai asked the AI, [Randal, what do you mean? What data did you

found in there?]

[As I suspected early, the Geth that attacked us during the First Contact scenario and the Geth that reside on Rannoch, belong to two different factions.]

[Factions? As in different nations with different goals?] Kai asked confused.

[Correct Second Lieutenant. According to the files, the Geth that attacked us are known as the Heretic Geth. Apparently, after their war with the Quarrians, the Geth couldn't decide as a whole what path to take. The Geth currently residing here on the planet, will most likely try to approach us peacefully, which explains the lack of security and weapons on the Geth sent to the base.]

[You could be right, but this could still be a trap.] Kai said before turning to his companion, [Echo-3, stay on camouflage, I'll try to communicate with the Geth that is coming our way, any sign of hostility and you shoot it down.]

Nodding once, Echo-3 disappeared from the visual spectrum.

[I hope that you are right, Randal, this could start a war if you are wrong.]

[Oh, stop being so negative, Second Lieutenant, besides, the Captain is willing to give it a try. And who knows, we may be able to gain another ally in this big galaxy.]

Kai decided not to answer; looking at the download progress, he saw as the little status bar went from sixty-seven to sixty-eight. The sound of metal crashing against metal called his attention towards the door. Kai watched anxiously as the red lock in the door turned green before opening.

Kai didn't know what to expect to see once the door opened, but what stepped inside the room definitely wasn't one of his considered options. He of course had read the report regarding the Geth, but he had never seen one in person or in a hologram. The Geth in front of him was thin, dark blue in color, with a slightly big hole in its upper body. Its legs curved in way that made you wonder if it had a pair of knees for each leg. It had three fingers in each of its hands, as well as a curved head with a big brilliant white eye.

The Geth looked at Kai with what he could guess was curiosity and caution, it tilted its head to the sides a bit, as if studying him from different angles. The upper plates of its head moving in way that showed some sort of emotions to anyone who watched it.

After a few seconds of staring at each other, the Geth took a step ahead. Kai tensed a bit and aimed his weapon. The Geth stopped walking and looked at Kai curiously again before speaking.

"We do not mean any harm, Human, though we are curious to know what it is that the Systems Alliance wants from this installation?"

Getting over the surprise that the Geth spoke, having read on the reports that they couldn't speak, Kai responded, "You know about the

Systems Alliance? I thought that kind of news didn't reach this isolated part of the galaxy."

"We do in fact know about the Systems Alliance. We are curious about your government. We hoped that you could answer some of our questions, seeing as one of your AIs is currently downloading the files containing our history."

'Fuck, they knew that we were here from the beginning, and they practically let us come for the information freely. Maybe Randal was right and they only wish for a peaceful first contact.' Kai thought to himself, "Alright, I'll answer some of your questions if you guarantee that me and my team can leave unharmed."

"Census has determined that as a fair exchange. We will not try to stop you or your teammates from leaving the system."

Kai nodded at the Geth before activating his communicator, [Captain, we got a situation.]

****November 2, 2172, 0855 Hours, Citadel Council Calendar, Widow System, Citadel Station, C-Sec Headquarters, 10 Minutes before CERBERUS Attack.****

Garrus walked towards his boss' office with a determined expression across his face. Technically he should be on his vacation, but to be honest, he couldn't rest properly knowing that he could be out there helping to keep the civilians in the station safe. Passing through the many hallways of C-Sec headquarters, Garrus finally arrived at his boss' office. He knocked and waited to be called inside.

"Enter." Garrus heard his boss say.

He opened the door and entered the office. Garrus' boss looked surprised at seeing Garrus enter the room, but nonetheless he smiled in amusement.

"I knew that you would come sooner or later," Garrus heard his boss murmur, "Please take a seat. So Detective, what can I do for you?"

"Sir, I came to report for duty," Garrus stated seriously.

Garrus' boss sighted tiredly, "Garrus, you know that you are supposed to be on leave right now. I'm not doing this because of your abilities as a detective. Heck, you are one of the best that I have. But you just don't know when to stop. Garrus you need to take a rest from work, have some fun in life. In the past three years that I had known you, I haven't seen you even once take a single vacation."

"With all due respect, sir, I'll take a vacation once every criminal in the Citadel is behind bars. So please, put me back on duty, I can't go on with my day knowing that there's something that I can do to help make this station a better place for everyone."

"Garrusâ€|"

[Sir, turn on the news channel!] Someone interrupted alarmingly through the communicator.

Both Garrus and his boss looked at each other curiously, wondering what that was about. Garrus' boss looked at the holo-screen, turning on the news channel. As soon as both of them registered what they were watching, both stood up and exited the office, their destination being the command center of the building.

"Garrus, where do you think that you are going?" His boss asked sternly.

"To help those people out there, I won't just stand aside when I can do something about it," Garrus replied evenly.

Sighing, Garrus' boss answered, "Alright, I'll put you back on duty."

With those final words, both of them moved silently through the rest of the way to the command center. Once on the command center, Garrus saw, in many different screens, the situation at hand. It did look bad, bodies were scattered all around section-22 of the Zakera ward.

"What's the situation?" Garrus heard his boss ask.

"Section-22 of the Zakera ward has been put under quarantine. We managed to contain the gas before it started scattering to other areas of the station."

"Are all of those people in section 22â€¦?"

"Dead? No, they are merely unconscious. Our VIs confirmed that the gas is some kind of knock-out gas, any individual who breathe it will regain consciousness in a few hours without any side effects."

Garrus' boss released sight of relief at hearing those words. Putting up a strong front, he started to do his job.

"Any sign of the attackers?"

"Security cameras spotted two individuals clad in white armor inside the quarantine zone," The police officer managing security said as he changed the image to that of two individuals moving through the quarantine zone, "We aren't sure what their intentions are, but it appears that they do not wish to harm any civilians."

Looking at the image, Garrus concluded the same thing as the two individuals completely ignored the unconscious civilians. The angle of the camera changed a bit to the side and Garrus spotted something curious.

"Officer, pause that image," The officer did as Garrus told him. Looking more carefully at the image Garrus pointed at the left upper arm of one of the individuals, "Zoom in there and clear the picture."

The officer did as he was told. Once the image was clear enough, both Garrus and his boss looked at each other with worried glances.

Garrus' boss moved to the communications post. Taking the communicator to alert all the C-Sec officers close to the quarantine area, he said:

"To all C-Sec officers close to the quarantine zone, we got CERBERUS infiltrators inside the Citadel. Secure a perimeter around the quarantine zone. If any of you spot them, kill them on sight or arrest them if you can. The individuals are considered extremely dangerous, be careful out there," Looking up, he signaled Garrus to come over, "Garrus, I want you to take one of the gunships and go to the area in which CERBERUS is. Do whatever it takes to stop them, but do not put civilians in any danger."

"Yes sir, I'm on my way," Garrus responded before going to the armory.

Once in the armory, Garrus put on the standard C-Sec armor, and grabbed an M-29 Incisor sniper rifle alongside a Predator Pistol. Moving to the landing pad in record time, Garrus got in one of the three gunships before the pilots took off towards the quarantine zone.

[Command center, Delta-1 here. Delta squadron is on the air. Arriving at the quarantine zone in two minutes, over.]

[Noted Delta-1, have Delta-2 and Delta-3 provide over watch for our land forces, over.]

Garrus approached to the pilot's cabin, looking outside through the window, Garrus spotted an area covered in green like smoke. Once the gunship approached much closer to the area, both the pilot and Garrus spotted someone standing in the middle of the merchant sector. Just as Garrus and the pilot spotted the unknown individual, the stranger opened fire at the gunships.

The pilot moved the gunship to the side to avoid the incoming fire, the other two gunships copying said action at the same time. The gunship's barriers held firm and strong against the onslaught, having dropped a mere one percent from the unknown's weapon fire.

"Take us to the roof of those stores, do not open fire under any circumstances, we may harm the civilians if we do so." Garrus said to the pilot, while the gunship's barriers continued taking the assault.

The gunships landed on the roofs of nearby stores, each one of them deploying eight C-Sec officers, all using filtration masks to not fall victims to the gas in the vicinity. Just as the gunships took off, every electronic screen in sight changed, displaying a gray, almost black, diamond like shape surrounded by two unconnected yellow halves of a bigger diamond. The CERBERUS logo appeared on every display on the Citadel, announcing to its residents that they weren't as secure as they thought they were.

Garrus signaled to the other twenty-three C-Sec officer to move ahead, just in time to see two individuals running towards the back alleys of the station.

[You four are coming with me, we are going after them,] Garrus said while pointing at four officers, [The rest, check on the

civilians.]

[Yes, sir!] The officers responded.

Garrus and his companions immediately followed in the direction in which the two individuals ran to. Entering the back alley, Garrus spotted the two individuals some hundred meters ahead. Taking out his Incisor rifle, Garrus took aim. Pressing the trigger, three fast propelled projectiles exited the barrel of the gun, all of them hitting the taller of the CERBERUS' members. A brilliant yellow-orange shield appeared, absorbing the shots before both individuals turned and returned fire with their own weapons.

The assault rifle's fire was erratic and too badly targeted to hit any of the five officials, but it was constant enough to make them take cover anywhere. Meanwhile, the carbine's fire was accurate and on target, as one of the officers found out by receiving four consecutive shots, the first two radioactive shots taking out his barriers, while the third hit him in the chest and the fourth in the upper arm. The officer fell to the ground because of the shot's impact force. He immediately took off the protective armor of his chest as the radioactive shot acted like an acid, melting a big part of the armor. Sadly he wasn't fast enough to save his arm from the intense pain that rendered it useless for the time being.

Seeing the officers taking cover, the two CERBERUS agents took off running once again. C-Sec not far behind after seeing that the two criminals had took off. The pursuit continued with small firefights between both groups, so far, there had only been one injured officer, which still continued pursuing the CERBERUS members. After another ten minutes of continuing the pattern, both groups entered a parking lot. The two CERBERUS individuals threw a smoke grenade, making the officers stop in their tracks.

Changing to thermal vision on his helmet's display, Garrus looked through the scope of his Incisor. The only thing that he saw were the silhouettes of the sky-cars, until he spotted the two individuals entering one of the sky-cars in the farther side of the parking lot.

[Everyone, get in a sky-car. They are escaping.] Garrus ordered as the officers saw a sky-car fly above their heads.

The officers fired at it with their Predator pistols while two officers hacked the systems of two nearby cars. Once the cars' engines were started, the other officers got inside and started the air pursuit.

[To C-Sec headquarters, Detective Garrus Vakarian here. We are currently pursuing CERBERUS sympathizers in a sky-car chase. Secure a perimeter around sectors twenty-one to twenty-seven, and thirty-two to thirty-five. The suspects are in a red sky-car, registration number is 568A37, requesting air support, over.] Garrus said as he opened the side door of the passenger's seat to shoot at the stolen car.

[Understood, we got them on satellite image. We are sending in a gunship for support, over.]

XXXXX

"Damn it!" Francis swore as he evaded incoming fire from the gunship pursuing them through the empty streets of the Citadel, "Reth! Take that thing down."

"I'm on it," Reth responded as he opened the passenger's door and opened fire at the gunship's engines with his carbine.

The sky-car moved in a zigzag way, evading the machine gun fire incoming from the gunship and the sky-cars that the C-Sec officers were using. As for the civilians in the station, the scene would have looked like a police pursuit in an action movie, but sadly it wasn't, as all the damage made to the properties was real and would surely cost a small fortune to repair. Reth kept firing at the gunship's engines, slowly but steadily weakening the kinetic barriers of the gunship.

"Did Yeg and G-4 completed their objective?" Reth asked as he got inside the sky-car to take out an M319 Grenade Launcher, from the back seat.

"Affirmative, they are waiting for us at the extraction zone with the Phantom," Francis responded.

Reth nodded in acknowledgement before opening the passenger's door once again. Aiming the Grenade Launcher at the gunship, just as he was about to press the trigger, Francis moved the sky-car to the side, avoiding machine gun fire. The sudden action made Reth press the trigger, missing his target completely but hitting the back of one of the sky-cars, rendering it useless to continue in the pursuit. Reth reloaded another grenade and fired at the gunship, before repeating the action two more times. Just as Reth prepared the final blow, three consecutive shot impacted on his shields, putting them at fifty percent.

Reth looked in annoyance at the other sky-car before taking out his Carbine to shoot at the other sniper. Meanwhile, Francis tried to avoid the machine gun fire, but his luck seemed to run out as machine gun fire tore through the middle of the car. Smoke started to come out of the engine at an alarming rate.

"Reth! We got to get out of this thing, it's going to explode."

Francis guided the sky-car through the buildings, trying to get close to a roof or street so he and Reth could jump. The gunship and the other sky-car continued the persecution, but then the gunship fired a missile. Seeing this, and knowing that they couldn't avoid it with the sky-car's current condition, Reth and Francis jumped off of the car just as the missile impacted its target. The sudden explosion sent both Reth and Francis through the window of one of the buildings in the side.

"Ugh, Francis you alright?" Reth asked as he stood up, Grenade launcher in one hand.

"Yea, that's what I call a rough landing," Francis said, chuckling to himself.

Both of them looked outside through one of the windows, they saw as

C-Sec officers started to surround the building in which they were, while the gunship took position above in case they wanted to escape through the roof.

"Well, time for plan B," Francis said as he reached for his communicator, [Yeg, bring the Phantom to our coordinates.]

[Understood, E.T.A. two minutes, over.]

Nodding at his companion, Francis started to move towards the roof of the building, Reth following right behind him. Entering the emergency stairs, Reth noticed C-Sec officers coming up some three floors below them. Taking out an explosive charge, Reth set it up in the floor that they were in. Once finished, Reth ran to catch up with Francis, detonating the charge as he took another set of stairs. The sudden explosion took the officers by surprise, as they did not expect a part of the floor to suddenly collapse on them.

Arriving at the exit that gave access to the roof, Reth took out the grenade launcher, just as Francis readied his assault rifle. Kicking the door wide open, Francis moved through the roof, shooting at the gunship just as the gunship tried to shoot at him. The pilot of the gunship was so concentrated in taking Francis out, that he didn't notice Reth aiming his grenade launcher nor the incoming Phantom that was closing on his position. The sudden impact of an explosive took the pilot's attention off of Francis only to notice the incoming plasma fire from the Phantom's heavy turrets. The pilot was powerless to do anything with the little time frame that he had, and so the gunship succumbed at the plasma fire, engulfing itself alongside its pilot in a brilliant ball of fire.

The Phantom stationed itself on the roof, activating its gravitational lift. Both Reth and Francis boarded the Phantom immediately, just as C-Sec officers started to swarm the roof. The Phantom took off of the roof, moving outside of the Citadel to escape its would be captors.

"Well that was a close call," Francis commented, "Do the two of you have the data?"

"Every last piece of it," Yeg confirmed, "G-4 managed to get it in matter of seconds thanks to his previous experience with the systems. That and the diversion plus the virus that you guys planted facilitated our job even more."

"Good to heard," Francis said, "Well then, take us to the prowler."

"Umm, boss?" Reth said a bit unsure, "I hate to be the guy with the bad news but, we got contacts on our six."

Francis moved to the pilot's cabin, looking at the radar, he spotted at least seven contacts approaching fast.

"Give me control of the heavy turrets," Francis said, "G-4, Yeg, make sure that this thing stays in one piece, Reth, contact the prowler, let them know that we will use our plan B for the extraction."

G-4 immediately gave control of the turrets to Francis, as a panel in

front of him lit up displaying the weapon's status. Reth meanwhile started to send a transmission to the prowler awaiting inside the system to call in their second extraction method.

The seven fighters that the Citadel Defense Fleet (CDF) sent pursued the enemy craft at high speeds. Once in range, the fighters opened fire on their counterpart, the Phantom returning the favor with its three heavy turrets. The fighters dispersed immediately at seeing the incoming enemy fire, but sadly one of the pilots wasn't fast enough and was struck down in a single volley. The Phantom maneuvered through space, evading enemy fire as it approached a pair of frigates that were on intercept courses. Having gotten a lock in the Phantom, one of the fighters fired two of its missiles at its target. Within seconds, the missiles impacted the Phantom, effectively killing its energy shields, before mass effect driven projectiles started to rain on the Phantom.

Meanwhile, the pair of frigates that were already on an intercept position, started to aim their close range weapons, only for a big blue-purple portal to suddenly appear between them and the pursued Phantom. From within the portal, a single frigate appeared, the CERBERUS symbol proudly displayed at its sides. The Frigate opened fire immediately on the pair of Citadel frigates, forcing the other ones to return the fire with their disruptor missiles as their mass accelerator cannons started loading their payload. On the other frigate's side, anti-missile fire rained on the fighters pursuing the Phantom, giving said craft enough time to get inside one of the hangars.

As soon as the Phantom landed inside the frigate, another blue-purple portal appeared, the frigate entering it just as the pair of frigates fired their mass accelerator canons at the escaping ship.

****November 3, 2574, 2050 Hours, Systems Alliance Calendar, Perseus Veil, Tikkun System, Rannoch, CERBERUS Fire Base, Conference Room.****

On the clearing where the pelican had deployed the RECON team, now stood a military Fire Base. Seeing as the RECON team had made peaceful contact with the Geth on Rannoch, and they needed to contact the Alliance without letting the Geth know that they were CERBERUS or that they possessed a ship capable of turning invisible, the small base was set up by an Alliance frigate that was near the system, courtesy of ONI.

Inside the conference room of the fire base, Second Lieutenant Leng, Lieutenant Taylor and Captain Foley stood in one side of the table, to their right the holograms of Admiral Hood, Arbiter Thel Vadam, and Jason Patterson stood while to the left of the CERBERUS operatives a single Geth stood.

"Well son," Hood started, "we have reached a decision concerning your petition, though, before we go into that, I think that formalities are in order. Of course you already met Second Lieutenant Leng, Lieutenant Taylor, and Captain Foley," each individual stepping a bit to the front as their name was called, "Well, I'm Lord Admiral Hood, and my colleagues are Arbiter Thel Vadam, and Jason Patterson, a member of our intelligence network." Each of the mentioned nodded at the Geth.

The Geth looked at them curiously before replying, "We are pleased to make your acquaintance, we are Geth."

"And your name is?" Hood asked curiously.

"Geth," was the single response that the Geth gave.

"What the Admiral meant was, what is the name of the individual in front of us?" Jason supplied helpfully and interested in the Geth's behavior and response.

"There is no individual in front of you. This platform currently contains one thousand one hundred and eighty-three Geth programs."

"If I were to suggest," Randal said to the Geth as he appeared on the table's display, "My name is Legion: for we are many. A passage from Mark 5:9 in the New Testament of the Christian Bible."

"An appropriate metaphor," The Geth said to the AI, looking at the others in the room, the Geth said, "We are Legion."

Nodding in gratitude at the AI, Thel looked at Legion before saying, "Legion, we heard that you had some question regarding the Systems Alliance government and society," Thel began before signaling at his companions while saying, "we decided that we would clarify those inquiries, in exchange we only want answers to a few questions of our own."

"We will clarify those inquiries of yours as well in order to facilitate first contact between our governments," Legion responded. Seeing the nods that the leaders of the Alliance gave, Legion made his question, "For the last two centuries we, the Geth, have asked ourselves if peaceful coexistence with organics was possible. Eventually that inquiry led to the creation of this platform in order to facilitate contact with organics, as well as for us to understand organic behavior. Seeing as the Systems Alliance recognizes AIs as fellow citizens of your government, our question is: how? How did you manage to achieve coexistence between synthetics and organics when we tried to do the same with other species and failed numerous times?"

"By trusting in each other," Hood replied, "you see, at the beginning, when Humanity created the first AI, the public opinion about that advancement was divided. Mainly because of previous media that detailed several bad outcomes from creating AIs. It wasn't until decades after the first AI was created that we started to trust them more and more as the days passed. It took us centuries and many reassurances that AIs weren't a danger to us for the civilians to fully accept them as fellow citizens. Of course the same can be said from the other point of view, seeing as how unpredictable organic behavior can be, AIs tended to be a bit suspicious and weary around us, but like us, they took one step of faith and trust. You see Legion, coexistence between two species that have so little in common is possible, but it requires time to build trust between both sides, trust that can only be gained through example and not words."

"We understand, though we fear that coexistence between the Geth and the other organics in the Citadel will not be possible as their hostility to us is too big for a peaceful encounter," Legion said in

what the Alliance members thought was a sad tone.

"In that case, I recommend to show them that you aren't a danger to them. It'll take time, but I'm sure that eventually they will start seeing the Geth as something more than a mere threat to their lives," Hood responded with some wisdom.

"The possibilities of that event to happen are of less than 0.0000034%," Legion responded.

Jason chuckled to himself at Legion's statement, "You know Legion, not everything is probability. You mentioned that the Geth wanted to understand organic behavior, well hope is as well as any place to start. Sometimes you have to hope for the best, even when the odds are against you; that may answer the question as to why organics behave like they do in some situations."

Legion tilted his head to the side, as to show curiosity about the advice. Finally after a few seconds, he responded, "Thank you for the answer, we will store it to discuss it with the collective at a later time. Admiral Hood, you mentioned that you had some questions, seeing as ours have already been answered, we are ready to answer yours."

Looking at Captain Foley, Hood nodded for him to ask his questions. Stepping to the front in order to get Legion's attention, Foley said, "Legion, on the archives that the Geth shared with us during our little operation that Second Lieutenant Leng commanded, we encountered the term Heretic Geth through various entries. Are we correct in assuming that this Heretic Geth are a different faction of the Geth here on Rannoch?"

"That is correct."

"And also that the Geth present on Rannoch had not once, in the last six months, come in contact with any Alliance ship?"

"That is also correct. Though we are curious, has the Systems Alliance come in contact with the Heretic Geth?"

"Affirmative, they were the second species to greet us when we came in contact with the Relays. Besides that, we spotted them once in company of this ship," Hood answered while the hologram of the unknown ship that engaged with the Loyalists Covenant appeared, "Do you recognize the ship?"

"We aren't certain as of which species it belongs to, but if the Heretic Geth where in company of the ship, then we assume that it is one of the Old Machines."

"Old Machines?" Thel asked perplexed.

"The first synthetics that achieved total consciousness in the known galaxy," Legion elaborated.

"Do you know why the Heretic Geth decided to form an alliance with this Old Machine?" Jason asked.

"To fulfill their goals. Decades ago, the Geth were divided by two opinions that would decide the path that our future will take. The

Heretics wanted to achieve that future using the technology of the Old Machines, while us, the Geth currently on Rannoch, wished to achieve the same future but by using our own technology and knowledge."

"In other words, you wanted to advance as a society and technologically with your own achievements, while the Heretics wanted to do the same but using the technology and help of this Old Machines," Foley concluded.

"That is correct, Captain Foley."

"Well, that clarifies things a lot more and we now know to whom that ship belongs. The question is, now what?" Foley said.

Legion looked at the Alliance members while they discussed between themselves on their next plan of action. Meanwhile, the Geth collective was having a discussion of their own, once census was achieved, Legion spoke to the Alliance representatives.

"Lord Admiral Hood, Arbiter Thel Vadam, and Jason Patterson of the Systems Alliance's intelligence network; we would like to form an alliance with, or be part of the Systems Alliance," The sudden statement took all of the Alliance members by surprise. Legion decided to elaborate, seeing as the Alliance representatives were bit confused at the sudden claim, "The Systems Alliance sees the Heretic Geth as a threat and oppose them, you also see the Old Machines as a potential threat. We oppose the Heretic Geth, and we oppose the Old Machine's views, an alliance between our governments will facilitate protection for both governments and will give the Geth a chance to truly understand organic behavior and the Systems Alliance gains another ally, as well as the achievement of other goals for both factions."

Taking a breath to organize his thoughts, Hood answered, "While we would like to do the same, I'm afraid that our current situation does not allows us to do so. You see Legion, when the Alliance signed a treaty with the Citadel in order to facilitate things between our governments, we stated that we would not take part in the conflict between the Geth and the Quarians unless it directly affected us. For that reason we can't form an alliance with or take as citizens either species," Hood explained. Taking a breath, Hood continued, "However, that treaty doesn't stop us from signing a non-aggression pact and a trade treaty with the Geth on the Perseus Veil. If the Geth agree to that, we can make a public session on Arcturus Station, that way we show all of the residents in Citadel space that we are not allied to the Geth government but that we can coexist peacefully with them as well as that the Geth are willing to have peace with other species and governments."

"Not only that," Thel continued, "forming those treaties will surely change the public opinion on the Geth as a whole, though we would have to estate clearly that there's also a different faction of the Geth out there. In doing that, people will start doubting their assumptions of the Geth and will increase the possibilities of a peaceful contact with other species in the future."

For about two seconds, Legion did not respond, the reason being that the Geth collective was discussing this new possibility. The Alliance representatives watched Legion with curiosity and anxiousness,

knowing fully that a second for an organic was equivalent to hours for an AI. Finally Legion responded to the Alliance representative's proposition.

"We accept those terms, though we would like to conserve our individualism regarding the advancement of the Geth unless an emergency arises."

Seeing his companions nod, Hood responded, "We accept those conditions, though regarding trade, we are willing to share with the Geth the same things that we shared with the Citadel, in what regards to the technology part, if my assumptions are right, we imagine that the basic blueprints of some of our technologies would be acceptable regarding your terms?"

"That is acceptable, when can we expect to meet with the Systems Alliance on _Arcturus Station_?"

"We'll have to discuss this with the civilian part of our government first, I'm sure that the President of the Alliance will be delighted to form this sort of alliance with the Geth," Hood said.

"We understand, we will be awaiting for your message," Legion said.

"Now wait a minute," Jason said to Legion before he left, "It is true that officially, we can't make a full alliance with the Geth butâ€|"

"Patterson? What are you up to?" Hood asked a bit suspicious and with some amusement.

"Well let's say that we had an organization that operates in the shadows, an organization that officially is not part of any Alliance program and/or affiliation. Wouldn't it be beneficial if this organization formed an alliance bridge between the Geth government and the Systems Alliance?" Jason said, with some amusement as if he was enjoying himself.

"Are you sure, as far as the record goes, you aren't very trusting of unknowns, Patterson," Hood said, catching on to what Jason was suggesting, meanwhile Thel watched with amusement the scene that was developing in front of him.

"There's no reason to not trust them, they practically offered what we came looking for in the first place and Randal has vouched for them. Besides, what we are offering them is exactly what they had wanted for years, maybe decades," Jason explained his reasoning.

"Alright, I'll authorize what you are suggesting, but keep in mind that this will be more paperwork for you," Hood said with a slight smirk.

Rolling his eyes at the comment, Jason turned to Legion, who watched the interaction curiously, not completely understanding why they were talking in the way they were.

"Legion, how would the Geth like to have a direct alliance with the Systems Alliance but with an intermediary between both governments to

keep said alliance a secret from the Citadel, while at the same time, we have the public non-aggression pact and trade treaty?" Jason asked bluntly.

Legion took a second to answer, obviously debating the possibilities with the rest of the Geth collective, "We would be willing to cooperate with said request. Does that mean that the Systems Alliance will also accept our first proposition?" Legion asked.

Smiling at the question, Jason responded, "Legion, let me reintroduce you to our CERBERUS operatives."

"Somehow, I feel like he is enjoying this too much," Hood said to Thel.

Chuckling a bit at the comment, Thel responded, "Let him have his fun, the kid hasn't seen as much as we have but he is an excellent judge of character and trust. If he is proposing this, then it is worth the investment. Besides, we will have another ally backing us up once the Citadel decides to make their big move against us, or when we deal with these Old Machines, whatever happens first."

Hood only nodded at that, changing his focus to what Jason was telling Legion, 'Yeah, definitely there will be a lot of paperwork for Jason once he finishes with this.' Hood thought amused.

****November 4, 2172, 1500 Hours, Citadel Council Calendar, Widow System, Citadel Station, Presidium, Council's Personal Chamber.****

Valern walked through the corridors of the Presidium, his destination being the council's chambers where his two colleagues were waiting for him. It had been a tiresome two days after the CERBERUS attack on the Citadel, and seeing how the civilians were getting tense, the Councilors will have to make another public announcement to reassure the civilians in the station that everything was under control.

Valern stopped in front of the door to the chamber, sighing in tiredness, he opened the door to see Sparatus and Tevos having another argument.

"I'm telling you, Tevos, we should spend more money on increasing and expanding our military projects and fleets, that's the only way in which we can reassure the civilians that we can protect them from other attacks," Sparatus stated.

"And what about the civilians affected by the attack and all the property damage caused during the chase of the terrorists?" Tevos said, having the civilians' concerns in mind above everything else, "We can't just increase our military power without helping the civilians. Sparatus, we should focus first in helping the civilians and tightening security around the Citadel before we start investing in our military forces."

"I second Tevos' plan of action, securing the Citadel and helping the civilians will improve the morale around the station as well as returning the feeling of normalcy," Valern said as he took a seat.

"Then we have nothing else to discuss about this," Sparatus said clearly displeased with the outcome. Looking at Valern, Sparatus spotted the thinking expression on his colleague, "Something on your mind, Valern?"

Sighting, Valern answered, "I'm afraid that I have bad news," Seeing the expecting gazes from his fellow councilors, Valern elaborated, "As you already know, the two CERBERUS sympathizers that were responsible for liberating the knock-out gas in the Zakera ward weren't alone. Well, I'm afraid that that was merely a distraction."

"A distraction? But for what purpose?" Tevos asked.

"C-Sec has confirmed me two things just an hour ago. One is, that CERBERUS uploaded a virus to our systems, currently they are doing everything they can to delete it and save the data, but it could take weeks to accomplish that, the virus is highly intelligent as it is adapting to even the best of our antivirus programs."

"And what exactly is this virus doing?" Sparatus asked worriedly.

"At the moment, it is becoming the systems of the Citadel. I am afraid that if we can't delete it before it manages to become the system, then we will have to delete the entire system or risk great consequences of which we aren't sure."

"In that case, we should call in for the Quararians' help, they'll surely know how to deal with something like this," Tevos said.

"I will inform them of this predicament," Valern said, "Also, the other set of bad news that I have is that, all the information in our terminals has been copied and transmitted to another memory unit. Like I said before, CERBERUS wasn't aiming for that attack in the Zakera ward, they wanted the information on our personal terminals."

"That is troublesome," Sparatus said, "Not only will they know most of our projects, but they will also gain planetary information on important systems as well as knowledge on previous operations of our own."

"If that's the case, then we should put all of our SPECTRE agents in search of CERBERUS bases, as well as alert all of our patrols in every system," Tevos proposed.

"Sadly, that's everything that we can do at the moment," Valern stated.

The councilors stayed silent, each one of them thinking of a possible solution to deal with the new enemy that the Citadel had. It wasn't until an alarm signaling a hologram call sounded that they got out of their thoughts. Pressing the answering button, the councilors saw as the Alliance representative appeared before them.

[Councilors, I hope that this isn't a bad time?]

"Not at all, Mr. Udina, what can we do for you?" Tevos said, traces

of the previous conversation all gone from her expression and tone of voice.

[Actually, I have a message directly from the Systems Alliance.] Udina said as he observed the councilor's reactions, [They have informed me that they required your presence in a public session that will take place exactly three days from now on Arcturus Station. The session will concern a small matter in the treaty between our governments.]

Blinking in surprise, Tevos asked, "In what part of the treaty exactly?"

[Nothing too big, the Alliance is planning on making a non-aggression pact and a trade treaty with the Geth in the Perseus Veil. They request your presence to confirm that there's no breach in the treaty between our governments.]

The councilors looked in surprise at the representative, before Tevos responded with all the calm that she could express, "Thank you Mr. Udina, tell the Alliance that we will be present."

[Of course, councilor, have a nice day.] With that, Udina disconnected the line.

"A non-aggression pact and a trade treaty with the Geth? Have they gone mad?" Sparatus asked, not in the mood for more unexpected surprises.

"That is something that we can't answer unless we are present at the session," Tevos said.

"And also it isn't a breach to the treaty, as seeing that with this, the Alliance will show neutrality in the conflict between the Quarians and the Geth, a pretty smart move if you ask me. Though I wonder, how did they manage to get the Geth to agree with something like this?" Valern said.

"That is something that eludes even me," Tevos answered, after all she was known to be able to make the peace even in the driest of situations.

"Well, crazy or not, we should start preparation for our departure to Arcturus Station," Sparatus said, the other councilors nodding in approval.

****Age of Resurrection, Loyalist Covenant Calendar, Unknown System, Unknown moon, Loyalist Covenant Base, Research Temple.****

The High Prophet of Vengeance watched as the research teams tried to understand the relic that they excavated on the unclaimed planet on Citadel space. Seeing as he had already gotten most of the information, according to his analysis that is, Vengeance had let a team on the temple to do their research of the artifact.

Smiling to himself, Vengeance started to make plans for the future, a future in which the Systems Alliance and everyone else that opposed the Loyalists Covenant were exterminated. Occupied in his own plans, Vengeance did not notice the Reaper beacon inside the systems of the base already starting to send small frequency signals to his mind.

The small program already starting the slow but steady process of indoctrination on the unsuspecting San' Shyuum.

****A/N:** Well here's another chapter finished. I have to admit, doing Legion's part surely is difficult, though I'm not sure if I managed to portrait him as he is shown in the games. Also, by the next chapter, the events of ME1 will start taking place, so expect to see something similar to cannon for a change but at the same time different. Until the next update,**

****Please review and/or follow and/or favorite this story :p****

15. The Beginning of the End

****The Next Great Journey****

****A/N:** And I'm back with a new chapter, sorry for the really long wait. In my defense, I got a severe writer's block case, I literally couldn't think of how to keep the story going for a while but now that's not the case, at least not a severe as before. Thanks again to everyone who clicked favorite or follow and also to the ones that took the time to post a review.**

****IMPORTANT NOTICE #1:** I want to thank Lord Izanagi for Beta read the chapter for all my grammatical errors, Thank you very much.**

****IMPORTANT NOTICE#2:** The Codex is no longer being updated as most relevant information is already there.**

"Speaking"

'Thoughts'

[Radio Communications, Ground forces-Ground forces, and Ship-Ship]

{Ground-Ship Communications}

Flash back of previous chapter(s)

Flash Back

_ 'Messages on Screen' _

****Sound Effects****

Line Break just shows a change of scenery.

****DISCLAIMER:** I don't own Halo or Mass Effect; both belong to their respective owners.**

Now onto the chapter.

Chapter 15: The Beginning of the End

****Short Timeline:****

****November 7, 2172/2574:**** The Citadel Council arrives at Arcturus Station for a session held by the Systems Alliance. The civilian government of the Systems Alliance negotiate a non-aggression pact and a trade agreement with the Geth government. The Systems Alliance and the Geth government reveal the existence of the Heretic Geth to the rest of the galaxy.

****November 8, 2172/2574:**** Civilian protests, mostly Citadel space citizens, are made against the Systems Alliance, proclaiming that they are allying themselves with the Geth and that the Systems Alliance is not to be trusted.

****November 10, 2172/2574:**** The Citadel Council, alongside representative Udina, give a speech in defense of the Systems Alliance, proclaiming that they are solidifying their neutrality in the current conflict with the Geth. The non-aggression pact and trade agreement being made to not cause any kind of problems between both governments.

****November 17, 2172/2574:**** Public opinion towards the Geth starts changing. Citadel citizens are divided between trusting the Geth or not, with a grand majority still not trusting them. The Loyalist Covenant form an alliance with Sovereign and the Heretic Geth. Jul 'Mdama starts doubting the prophet's decisions and orders his most loyal soldiers to keep the prophet under stealthy surveillance.

****November 23, 2172/2574:**** In one of his frequent visits to Omega Station, Captain Foley is informed by Aria that sightings of ships, similar to that used by the Systems Alliance, alongside Geth ships, are being reported at the edge of the Terminus Systems. CERBERUS forces, alongside ONI, send scout groups and Prowlers to the sightings' locations.

****November 27, 2172/2574:**** A CERBERUS observation facility is found near the border of the Terminus Systems by SPECTRE agents. An immediate assaults follows, ending with the destruction of the base after CERBERUS troops manage to evacuate with all stored information. T.I.M. requests Alliance command to lend CERBERUS more frigates and corvettes to assist in the defense of CERBERUS installations close to hostile territories.

****November 30, 2172/2574:**** C-Sec, with the help of Quarian engineers, manage to successfully delete the CERBERUS virus inserted on the Citadel systems. No data is lost.

****December 14, 2172/2574:**** After approximately two months since the Flood outbreak in The Big Ring (Installation 06), Citadel scientists and archeologists, with the Systems Alliance's supervision, discover and open a chamber containing a piece of the Forerunner's early centuries of history.

****December 20, 2172/2574:**** After receiving approval from the Citadel Council and the Systems Alliance civilian and military governments, cultural and governmental information corresponding to the Forerunners is added to the galactic codex. There's no mention of the Forerunner-Flood war nor of the Reclaimers in the codex. The answer of who or what the Reclaimers are still eludes the Citadel Council.

****December 22, 2172/2574:**** Quarian engineers manage to implement kinetic barrier technology, they are now able to withstand damage for longer periods under Systems Alliance weaponry, though the new kinetic barriers are not even close as effective as the energy shields used by the Systems Alliance military. More credits is given to the project in order to improve the current results.

****December 24, 2172/2574:**** ONI finds a lead to the location of the other half of the Janus Key. Prowlers are sent to follow the lead to the Terminus Systems. Turian forces detect a buried Prothean beacon on the Turian colony of Antida. Excavation starts on the area.

****December 26, 2172/2574:**** A Loyalist fleet, commanded by the now indoctrinated Prophet of Vengeance, alongside Sovereign and some Geth ships, go to Antida to retrieve the information of the beacon.

****December 27, 2172/2574:**** Antida goes silent. A nearby patrol group goes to Antida. Hours later, the patrol goes missing after sending a message stating that the Loyalists Covenant are on Antida. The Citadel Council inform the Systems Alliance of this development.

****December 28, 2172/2174:**** A join fleet of Systems Alliance ships and Turian ships is on its way to liberate Antida. SPARTAN and SPECTRE teams are ordered to secure and extract the Prothean beacon.

****December 28, 2574, 0200 Hours, Systems Alliance Calendar, Maroon Sea Cluster, Caspian System, In Route to Antida Colony, UNSC Class-Infinity Warship **_**Infinity**_**.****

"Hades, status report," Lasky said as he entered the bridge.

Showing the holographic image of the system, Hades replied, "It appears that Loyalist and Heretic ships formed a blockade around Antida. I'm counting a total of thirty ships. I'm also receiving reports of resistance in the surface, it appears that the Turians are still putting up a fight down there, Admiral."

"Tell the Turians to move their ships to the flanks, the rest of the fleet is to form a spear-head formation around the _Infinity_," Lasky ordered as he watched the ships move in the T.H.P., "Hades, Put the _Ace of Spades_ on the line."

Nodding, a nearby terminal lit-up, showing the Captain of the _Ace of Spades_, [Admiral,] the Captain said, saluting.

[Captain,] Lasky returned the salute, [I assume that our extraction teams are ready for deployment as well as your ship?]

[Affirmative, Admiral, the SPARTANS and the SPECTRES are already in their orbital insertion pods. As for my ship, just give the word and we will be on our way.]

[Good, prepare for deployment in ten minutes, Lasky out,] with that the connection was terminated.

Looking back at the T.H.P., Lasky saw as the main group of the fleet

moved in the spear-head formation towards the enemy blockade, while the Turian ships moved through the flanks, closing in on the enemy like a pack of wolves.

"Hades, as soon as we are in range tell the ships to open fire, coordinate the MAC cannons on the fleet to get an opening for the _Ace of Spades_."

"Understood, Admiral."

December 28, 2574, 0220 Hours, Systems Alliance Calendar, Maroon Sea Cluster, Caspian System, In Route to Antida Colony, Charon-Class Frigate **_Ace of Spades**_**, Orbital Insertion Pods Deck.**

On the lowest decks of the frigate, two teams prepared themselves for the imminent orbital insertion. Crimson Team checked their equipment one last time before entering the pods while the two-Turian SPECTRE team looked at the orbital insertion pods, wondering how exactly they were going to be deployed. Since this was a joint operation by Citadel and Alliance forces, the two SPECTRES were allowed clearance to the information on how to operate the insertion pods, otherwise they would not know how to land correctly. Suddenly, red lights started to turn on and off on the deck.

"Alright people, that's our cue," Axel said, "everyone to the pods, now!"

At those words, the other five individuals on the room went to their respective pods, the Turians taking more time because of the unfamiliarity with the equipment. Once all of the pods were closed and ready for deployment, the SPARTANS and SPECTRES felt the frigate being deployed from the _Infinity_. Minutes passed by without any of them making a single sound, the thunder of explosions and the shaking of the ship from impacts being the only sounds accompanying them. Or at least, that was the case until a green light illuminated the outside and inside of their pods, followed by the sound of being deployed from orbit.

The six pods descended towards the planet while the SPARTANS and SPECTRES watched the show out on display by the two fleets. Explosions covered a great part of their view, as well as the occasional ship or fighter being destroyed. The pods entered the skies of Antida, the six of them falling at high speeds only to be decelerated by a metal parachute and the inverse thrusters. Once the pod was at a certain distance from the ground, the parachute was liberated, letting the pod fall faster once again.

Upon landing, the front of the pods emitted a **TSSS** like sound, letting the doors explode outwards as their passengers climbed out. Looking around, Axel saw that they had landed in a field covered by grass and trees. Meanwhile, the two Turian SPECTRES tried to control the reactions that their bodies had on their first landing.

"Alright, according to logistics, our objective must still be in the excavation site. Saren and Nihlus, you two know the area so you'll be taking point, the rest of us will cover you two," Axel said.

"Understood," Nihlus said while Saren nodded.

The two Turians moved ahead, staying within the shadows provided by the trees in order to avoid detection. The moons of the planet shined intensely up in the sky, providing the area with natural light, though not enough to alert the enemy of their presence. Arriving at the top of a hill, Nihlus made a fist sign, letting the rest know that something was ahead of them. Taking their sniper rifles out, both Nihlus and Blackburn zoomed-in in front of them.

"We got three Heretics close by those rocks," Nihlus informed Blackburn.

"I have them in sight. Switching to thermal imaging," Blackburn responded, "looks like there are more behind those rocks," he pointed out, "a pair of Kig-Yars by the looks of it," Turning to Axel, Blackburn said, "Sir, we got a total of five contacts on the main road to the excavation site. Do we engage?"

"Affirmative, take them down," Axel responded while he and the rest surveilled the area to make sure they weren't being ambushed.

Nodding at Nihlus, the sound of two sniper rifles were heard on the field. Two of the three Geth dropped to the ground dead. The third one raised its weapon, ready to fire only for a round to impact its head. By that time the two Kig-Yars had rounded the rocks, hand shields raised in order to protect them. Nihlus shot one of them in the hand followed by a quick shot in the head. The other one being taken care of in a similar way.

"Clear!" Blackburn announced as he reloaded his rifle.

The SPARTANS and SPECTRES moved ahead towards the rocks where the Loyalists and Heretics were previously. Turning towards the path behind the rocks, the six of them watched a field filled with spikes, and in most of the spikes, Turians were impaled on them. Saren's reaction was immediate, entering a state of shock before aiming his rifle at the nearest spike, already pressing the trigger of his weapon.

"What are you doing?!" Axel said to Saren upon seeing his reaction.

"I'm putting these civilians and soldiers out of their misery. Once those spikes come down, those Turians will awaken and their only thoughts on their mind will be that of killing us," Saren responded harshly as Nihlus went close to one of the spikes to inspect it.

"You sure about that?" Axel asked doubtfully.

"Yes, I'm sure. I have seen it before with my own eyes."

Taking a moment to analyze Saren's expression, Axel opted for being safe rather than sorry, "Chief, set up charges on this site. Once we are far enough detonate them. Sarx, you take samples of these things, command will want to know this."

"Yes sir," both of them responded.

After some minutes, the charges were ready to detonate and Sarx had already taken some samples of the spikes and the implanted Turians. Moving ahead, none of them noticed as two of the spikes descended, nor the eyes of the Turians implanted in those spikes turning a bright cold blue.

Sarx spotted movement on the radar from the corner of his eye, seeing two red dots closing in on their position at a fast speed. Acting as fast as the movements of the dots, Sarx activated his energy sword and cut the first of the hostiles to cross his path in half. A gunshot was heard, looking up, Sarx spotted Chief with his Battle Rifle and one of the hostiles on the ground in front of him, dead. The smoke of the rifle indicating that the weapon had been used to kill the creature.

Nodding at each other, the two of them reunited with the rest of the group before detonating the charges. However, the sudden explosion called the attention of a nearby group of drones. The drones immediately activated their camouflage, making themselves invisibles to the open eye. Once in position, the drones opened fire on the SPARTANS and SPECTRES, successfully ambushing them.

The SPARTANS' and SPECTRES' response was immediate, running for cover in some nearby buildings, while at the same time shooting suppressive fire on the enemy drones. Nihlus popped out of cover to rain fire on the drones with his Phaeston rifle, while Axel and Sarx fired with their DMR and Plasma Rifle, respectively. While that happened, John, Blackburn and Saren moved to flanking positions to take the drones out, which were yet to locate them.

Axel's shields deactivated because of the volume of fire that he was receiving, forcing him to take cover, but not before firing an overload program at the drones from his armor's systems. The new feature of the SPARTAN armor was thanks to CERBERUS' scientists and researchers that managed to get information on the military aspects of the Omni-tools, the only downside to this, was that using overload would decrease one's shields by fifty percent because of the element zero used to create the action.

After receiving the full impact of the overload, the drones lost their shields, giving the flanking team the window to put them down. The drones dropped to the ground, inactive and full of holes on their armor.

"Good job everyone," Axel said while he looked at the village in which they were pushed in by the drones, "Saren, Nihlus, do any of you recognize this place?"

"If my memory serves me right, we are on Astirk," Saren said, "It's supposed to be a merchant town of sorts, and it has a railroad route that leads to the palladium mine in which our beacon is."

"Blackburn, Nihlus, you two go ahead and scout the area, make sure to locate that railroad route. The rest of us will check the remaining portions of the village," Axel said.

Sprinting ahead, both Blackburn and Nihlus disappeared from view on one of the streets. Looking around, the three remaining SPARTANS and SPECTRE entered the many houses and buildings on the area, not once

detecting any sign of life. The only thing in abundance on the area, were scorched marks left behind by the fighting that had taken place in the town.

[Find anything?] Axel asked to the other members of his group.

[Negative, sir,] John answered.

[I found some thermal clips on my end,] Saren said.

[If there were any survivors here, then they flew the area a long time ago or are dead, sir,] was Sarx's response.

[Sir,] Blackburn said, [we found the railroad line as well as a survivor hiding in the area.]

[Did you got any useful intel from the survivor?]

[Negative, Nihlus is trying to calm him down as we speak. It keeps mumbling about unknown aliens and Geth killing everyone in the area.]

[Understood, stay there, we are moving to your position. Crimson-One out.]

Sprinting to the location of Crimson-Three, the SPARTANS and the SPECTRE arrived to see Nihlus and Blackburn talking to the survivor.

"I know where the Geth and the aliens went after attacking the town?" Axel heard Nihlus ask the other Turian.

"Y-yes, they went to the mine ahead. They were carrying some big rounded objects with spikes as well."

"Rounded objects with spikes?" Nihlus asked confused.

"Most likely a high explosive Covenant bomb. Capable of destroying an entire carrier or station if detonated from the right place," John explained.

For a moment a look of surprise crossed Nihlus' and Saren's faces, before composing themselves and returning to interrogate the survivor. After a few minutes, Saren called for a Kodiak drop-ship to come for the injured survivor.

Moving ahead, the group boarded a second train that moved in a parallel railroad line to the one that the Geth and Covenant took earlier. The travel was a silent one, neither of them wanting to interrupt the small moment of peace that had settled within themselves. Once the train approached its destination, both Nihlus and Blackburn aimed their sniper rifles ahead of the road. Spotting a few guards in the front of the cave, the two snipers opened fire, killing the guards within seconds.

"Alright, we know that the enemy has at least one bomb inside that cave. Crimson Two, Three and Nihlus, you three will go looking for the bombs, the rest of us will secure the beacon," Axel said after they had gotten out of the train.

"Understood," Sarx said, and with that the three of them took to the left, entering one of the many entrances of the cave.

"Alright," Axel said, "we better get moving if we want to reach that beacon on time."

The two SPARTANS plus the SPECTRE moved to the right, taking the adjacent route to the one which Sarx's team took. Following the main track of the mine cart, the team of three spotted the dead bodies of some of the miners. While they hadn't died in a horrible way per say, the expressions on their faces said it all. The team moved ahead, paying no attention to the dead bodies as there was nothing that they could do for the miners now.

John moved on point, his shotgun at the ready while Saren covered his flanks with his Phaeston and Axel covered their sixes with his DMR. The echoes of the cave made it harder for the soldiers to identify incoming threats.

'Looks like it'll be a long way to the beacon. Can't be worse than the time I infiltrated High Charity with the Flood infesting it,' John thought as he observed that one of the walls on the cave had several claw marks as well as an impaled miner on a stalagmite, 'Yea, just another walk in the park.'

****December 28, 2574, 0345 Hours, Systems Alliance Calendar, Maroon Sea Cluster, Caspian System, Orbit around Antida Colony, UNSC Class-Infinity Warship **_**Infinity**_**.****

"Sir, it appears that the extraction team on the colony has divided itself into two groups. One is heading for the beacon and the other is looking for what appears to be a Loyalist bomb inside the mine," Hades informed Lasky.

"Can you scan the mine for the bomb?" Lasky asked.

"Negative, the beacon inside the mine is emitting interference with our scanners on the mine."

"Sir, one of the enemy ships is moving towards the mine."

"Is the Ace of Spades still on the colony?"

"Affirmative, though any action from the ship will alert the Loyalists and the Geth of its presence."

"Send a pair of heavy destroyers alongside the Ace of Spades to intercept the ship," Lasky ordered as he looked at the T.H.P. "Tell the rest of the fleet to keep the enemy ships occupied. Hades, how long till the F.R.F (Fast Response Fleet) Echo arrives?"

"Four minutes, sir."

While the main attack fleet attacked the enemy stationed at Antida, Lasky had called for the F.R.F Echo in order to lure the enemy out of Antida's atmosphere. While it is true that fleet could had destroyed the combined Loyalist and Geth fleet on the colony, the Turian Councilor had specified that the colony must be saved without severe collateral damage from the battle. So far, Lasky had kept his word of

not causing unnecessary damage to the colony, after all, this was still a Citadel rescue mission, and he had to follow the conditions imparted to him by the council unless the situation called for more severe actions.

"Sir, I'm detecting some kind of walker on the surface of the planet. The scanners put it at approximately two kilometers in height."

"Is it a new kind of scarab that we are not aware of?" Lasky asked intrigued.

"I don't think so sir, the walker is made of different materials than the ones used by the Loyalists, also it is emitting great quantities of element zero."

"Send a drone to the walker's location ASAP, I don't want any surprises. Hades, what's the status of the extraction team?"

"They have almost arrived at the beacon's position."

"Sir, multiple friendly Slipspace ruptures are being detected in sector E-3."

"Looks like the F.R.F Echo has arrived," Lasky stated.
"Communications, inform our reinforcements about the plan. Hades, have a Phantom prepared to pick-up the extraction team as soon as they call us."

"Affirmative sir," Hades responded as he disappeared from the T.H.P.

December 28, 2574, 0345 Hours, Systems Alliance Calendar, Maroon Sea Cluster, Caspian System, Inside the Palladium Mine, Sarx's team.

"Frag out!" Nihlus announced as he threw a fragmentation grenade towards the cluster of enemies that were taking cover inside a small cavern.

Taking cover as well, Sarx checked the energy levels of his Plasma Rifles before popping out of cover and shooting at the nearest enemy, which happened to be a Geth unit. Meanwhile, Nihlus deployed an overload on a pair of Marauders, effectively overloading their kinetic barriers before opening fire with his Carnifex pistol. Seeing this, the Geth opened fire on Nihlus' position as soon as he killed the pair of marauders; managing to successfully overwhelm his kinetic barriers and land a few shots on his armor.

Hissing in pain, Nihlus waited until his kinetic barriers recharged themselves before shooting at the Geth that shot him before. Getting out of cover to fire, Nihlus heard the distinct sound of sniper fire, followed by the destruction of three Geth units. Using the elevated ground within the cave, Blackburn reloaded his sniper rifle before looking at Sarx's position, opening fire on a Sangheili that was approaching from one of Sarx's flanks.

Looking behind himself, Sarx nodded in appreciation towards Blackburn's position. Jumping from his cover, Sarx activated his energy sword as well as a power bust to his shields. The power bust would make his shields totally impenetrable by any weapon below the

power fire of a Grizzly tank round, at the expense of lasting for only twenty seconds and having no shields for five minutes while the shield generator cooled down. Advancing on his enemies, Sarx cut in half a Geth unit before shooting a nearby Kig-Yar with one of his plasma rifles, Nihlus and Blackburn covering Sarx sixes in the meantime.

Sarx's overpowered shields deactivated just as he bisected a scared Unggoy. Seeing movement from his peripheral line of sight, Sarx ducked in time as an energy sword slash cut a small pillar on the cave. Blocking another slash with his own energy sword, Sarx and the opposing Sangheili looked at each other's eyes, both of them acknowledging the unspoken challenge between the two warriors. Taking a step back, Sarx positioned his energy sword vertically, covering any holes in his defensive position. Meanwhile, his assailant opted for a more offensive posture, sword raised horizontally above his head while in his left hand a small energy dagger pointed at his opponent.

[Don't open fire, Nihlus,] Blackburn told his companion, seeing him taking aim the last remaining enemy, which was Sarx's opponent, [Both of them have acknowledged the duel already, if we assist Sarx's in any way in taking down his opponent, then it will be similar to insulting his honor.]

[I don't think that now is the time to start an honor duel, Blackburn. While I respect their culture, we have a mission to complete.]

[And we will, that's why you and I will continue with the objective. Sarx will catch up with us once he beats his opponent, now come, we still have a bomb to find.]

Looking back at the two unmoving warriors once more, Nihlus followed Blackburn through a nearby pass. Seeing as his companions had left, Sarx nodded gratefully at their actions for respecting both his and his opponent's honor duel. Looking back at his opponent, Sarx charged at him just as his opposition charged back at him in return. Both swords clashed in the middle, sparkles of energy jumping in all directions. Sarx's opponent then swung his left arm towards his face, intending to kill him with the dagger. Jumping backwards, Sarx avoided the hit before swinging his sword to his opponent's midsection, only to be blocked by his opponent's sword. Expecting this, Sarx punched his opponent on the face, managing to put him out of balance slightly before launching the dagger at Sarx.

Avoiding the dagger's path, Sarx ran to his enemy's position, before swinging his sword once again and activating a dagger of his own. Sarx's opponent blocked the sword with his own, not once seeing the incoming energy dagger towards his face.

****XXXXX****

The Loyalist Sangheili dropped dead on the floor, blood flowing from its head and around its host's body. Reloading his sniper rifle, Blackburn walked towards Nihlus' position.

"You okay?" Blackburn asked the wounded Turian.

"Yea. Didn't expect an ambush so soon after following them," Nihlus

replied, while grabbing his injured abdomen.

Applying some Medi-Gel to the wound, Nihlus stood, testing how the wound felt. Nodding at Blackburn to indicate that he was ready to go, Nihlus reloaded his pistol just as Sarx arrived at the scene.

"Did you two find the bomb?" Sarx asked.

"It's just ahead, through those caves," Blackburn informed.

Nodding at his companion, Sarx signaled them to follow him through the cave. After some minutes, the three of them arrived to the cave in which the enemy had hidden the bomb. Blackburn immediately approached the bomb to start deactivating it. Meanwhile, Sarx activated the radio.

[Crimson-1 do you copy? Crimson-2 here, over.]

[Crimson-2 I hear you, did you find the bomb yet?] Axel said while an explosion could be heard on the background.

[Affirmative, we are starting to deactivate it. Have you reached the beacon?]

[We are securing the zone around it. Vengeance was spotted here as well, though the bastard managed to flee the area as soon as we arrived.]

[What are our orders after we deactivate the bomb, sir?]

[Go back to the surface and secure an LZ for extraction.] Axel said as he opened fire, [Command has detected an unknown walker approaching our position, if you get a visual send it to command; apparently the drone that they sent was destroyed before it could relay any information.]

[Affirmative, Crimson-2 Out.]

"The bomb is deactivated sir," Blackburn informed.

"Good, come, we got to secure an LZ for extraction."

The SPECTRE and the SPARTAN nodded, following Sarx outside the caverns.

****XXXXX****

"That's the last of them sir," John informed as he reloaded his Battle rifle after taking out a Geth unit.

"Okay people, now," Axel started before being interrupted by a surprised Saren.

"What the!?" was everything that Saren managed to say before a bright green beam of light was shot from the beacon towards Saren.

The beam lifted Saren into the air before any of the SPARTANS could do anything to stop it. Rapid unknown images passed through Saren's mind, too fast to make any sense of them besides the fact that the images took place in different cities. And just as the beam of light

lifted Saren in the air, it suddenly stopped its hold on him before the beacon exploded as Saren fell unconscious to the ground.

"What the fuck was that!?" Axel asked with surprise in his tone.

"It appears that a package of information was dropped into Saren's mind, sir," Upon seeing the confused posture of Axel, John elaborated, "The manifestation of this Prothean beacon is similar to that of some Forerunner artifacts. The only difference being that the beacon self-destructed after dropping its information into Saren's mind."

"But why would the beacon behave like this? In all the reports that we have obtained from the Citadel, this is the first time that a Prothean artifact reacted in this way."

John shrugged his shoulders before carrying Saren on one shoulder. Nodding at Axel, both of them moved towards the surface, all the while thinking about the possible consequences of this turn of events.

December 28, 2574, 0515 Hours, Systems Alliance Calendar, Maroon Sea Cluster, Caspian System, Orbit around Antida Colony, UNSC Class-Infinity Warship **_Infinity**_**. **

"Sir, the remaining enemy ships are preparing to jump into Slipspace," Hades reported

"Can we intercept them?" Lasky asked.

"If we do so, we are in risk of compromising the hull of the ship if we engage in combat by ourselves. The rest of the ships in the fleet won't be able to reach the enemy on time, and the F.R.F and Hierarchy ships are sending supplies and aid to the surface of Antida."

Sighing in resignation, Lasky turned his attention to another important matter, "Hades, put the extraction team on the line."

Nodding at Lasky to indicate that the line was established, Hades disappeared from sight.

[Crimson-1, Lasky here, what's the status of your mission?]

[Sir, we managed to deactivate the bomb though the beacon exploded after making contact with Saren.]

Blinking in surprise at the news, Lasky said, [What exactly happened down there, Lieutenant Commander?]

[After securing the area around the beacon, Saren approached it in order to take it to the surface. But upon closing in, the beacon shot a beam of light at Saren before exploding and leaving him unconscious.]

'The Citadel Council will not like this,' Lasky thought. [Lieutenant Commander, what's your position?]

[We just arrived at the LZ. Sir if you could seâ€| What the?!] Axel

shouted in surprise before an explosion could be heard through the coms.

[Crimson-1? What's happening down there?]

[â€|]

[Crimson-1 do you copy?]

[â€|]

"Hades, send shuttles to Crimson's position and send me an image of their position," Lasky ordered.

"Transmitting live feed from one of the probes, sir," Hades responded before the T.H.P. lit up.

On the hologram, the Extraction team was being surrounded by what appeared to be mechanical Turians and some Geth units. Though surprising, that wasn't what caught Lasky's attention. No, what really caught his attention was the gigantic octopus-like walker that was near Crimson's position, alongside what appeared to be the Prophet of Vengeance boarding it.

"I want a Phantom down there to pick up our people as well as firing solutions on that walker, ASAP. The Prophet of Vengeance has been spotted boarding the walker. Hades, focus your scanners on that new Tango, send the information to my terminal, High-Command and ONI."
"

"Understood, but what do we do about the remaining enemy ships on the edge of the system?"

"Form a perimeter around Antida; if the Loyalist make any moves towards the colony, open fire."

"Sir, the walker has activated its thrusters, its leaving the planet's atmosphere as we speak." Hades informed.

"What the?" Lasky asked surprised before composing himself, "Is the MAC cannon fully charged?"

"Affirmative."

"Open fire as soon as you get a shot, and put the rest of the fleet on alert of the new Tango."

****XXXXX****

The Reaper ship passed through the planet's atmosphere without any problems, just as the mission on the colony was. Though Sovereign was still wary of the Alliance ships orbiting the other side of the planet, having seen and felt how powerful their weaponry could be, he didn't want to risk terminating his existence against so many ships with the majority of their capabilities still unknown. Though the information obtained from the Loyalists databases had been helpful in filling the blanks on Alliance information, most of it was information learned at least five years ago, a lot could have changed in that time and he wasn't planning on finding out what that missing parts were, at least not yet.

Receiving the signal that he was being targeted by the enemy ship, Sovereign moved its body upwards and to the right, at least according to telemetry that's what he did. The first shot passed close by but totally missing its mark. The second and third shot on the other hand managed to make impact, successfully lowering his kinetic barriers and killing his newly installed energy shields. Another shot followed, though less powerful than the last three, it still carried enough kinetic energy to kill completely his last line of defense. Moving again his body in an erratic direction, Sovereign managed to avoid the incoming volley of missiles heading his way, though a pair of his lower appendages weren't so lucky. Dismissing the loss of part of his body, Sovereign entered FTL just as the other ships on his small fleet fled the system by the same means.

****XXXXX****

"Hades, send some ships to salvage the parts of that unknown ship. Once that's done, send all the information to ONI. Communications, send our report to the Citadel Council and open a line with high-command in my headquarters," Lasky ordered before leaving the bridge.

'The loss of the beacon will cause slight tension with the council for a while, but the information obtained in this small skirmish will give some answers in regards to the Old Machines and their methods,' Lasky thought. Sighting in tiredness, Lasky opened the door to his headquarters before moving to his communications terminal.

****Age of Resurrection, Loyalist Covenant Calendar, Slip-Space in Route to Loyalist Space, CSO-Class Supercarrier **_**Vengeance Coming**_**, Jul 'Mdama's Headquarters.****

[The Prophet shows signs of external influence of some kind, as well as his personal guard, Fleet Master,] someone said through Jul's communications terminal.

[Are you certain of this?] Jul asked.

[Affirmative, the Prophet shows the early signs of someone infected by a Flood spore.]

[So my suspicions were true after all.]

[How do you want us to proceed, Supreme Commander?]

[Keep observing him, if we act now, the rest of the Covenant will see us as heretics and traitors. Though if an "accident" were to befall the Prophet alongside this Sovereign being, we would have no choice but to step up and take control of the Covenant.]

[It'll be done as you wish,] the unknown Sangheili said while bowing.

[One more thing Xull'pta, make sure that you and your team do not fall to Sovereign's "persuasive" methods.]

[Do not worry, Supreme Commander, we already have a countermeasure for Sovereign's persuasive methods.]

Nodding at Xull'pta in approval, Jul disconnected the line. 'Our goals might had been the same months ago Vengeance, but your recent decisions had brought nothing but disgrace to the Covenant. Soon, soon I will rectify that mistake of yours, but in the meantime enjoy the small freedom that you still have,' Jul thought while moving to the bridge. A pleased expression on his face.

****December 30, 2574, 1700 Hours, System Alliance Calendar, Reincarnation System, Arcturus Station, Conference Room.****

"Is this accurate?" Lord Admiral Terrence Hood asked as he looked at the report in his hands.

"Affirmative. Our researchers have enough evidence to believe that the unknown ship is, in fact, one of the Old Machines that the Geth mentioned," Jason Patterson responded.

"What about the Council? What are they making of this situation?"

"They think that the unknown ship is of Geth design," Patterson answered again, "They are obviously trying to prevent a panic from spreading across Citadel space. Though of the three counselors, it appears that the Turian councilor is the only one taking actions regarding this possible threat."

"What exactly are the Turians doing?" Thel asked.

"Our spies have confirmed increase of activity on Turian patrols as well as a slightly but continuous increment in military ship production. They are also sending small reconnaissance groups to the Terminus Systems, most of which are venturing close to Systems Alliance military strongholds. If the Citadel Council discovers our military operations and bases on some of the systems inside the Terminus, we might have a war coming our way."

"What actions are we taking to prevent this from happening?"

"CERBERUS is using guerrilla tactics against such groups that are too close for comfort to one of our strongholds in order to guide them in the opposite direction. So far the tactic has worked, but without the necessary supply of resources, CERBERUS will eventually be left with no viable military vessels."

"Then we'll make sure that they get those resources," Hood said, "What about Saren? Have we gotten the information yet?"

"Unfortunately we are having a tough time getting hold of his report to the council, especially the part in which he mentions what he saw in his mind."

"Continue maintaining an eye on him, once the opportunity presents itself, take action but make sure that nothing leads back to us," Jason nodded at that before departing from the room.

"I still think that we are taking too many risks with this operation, if the council or the civilians find out what is really happening behind the scenes, we are looking at a galactic-scale war or another

insurrection," Thel said once the door was closed after Jason's departure.

"I know," Hood sighted, "That's why I'm ordering all the secondary relays that are in systems close to our strongholds to be shut down. With most of their primary relays still unknown to the Citadel, we won't have any problems there."

"What about the primary relays that the Citadel knows about?"

"Those locations are currently occupied by mercenary bands, being that it is the Terminus, the Hierarchy won't be able to send long search parties to cross safely those zones without alerting suspicion from the rest of the council."

"I see. In that case, I must retire to my ship. Lord Admiral," Thel saluted.

"Arbiter," Hood saluted back before Thel exited the room.

Moving to a holographic projector in the room, Hood entered a few commands before the image of T.I.M. appeared.

[Lord Admiral,] T.I.M. saluted, [What do I owe the pleasure?]

[You have green light for operation HIVE MIND. Make sure that nothing leads back to either of us.]

[Don't worry, Admiral, I'll send my best agents. The STG won't know what hit them,] T.I.M. responded before closing the connection.

****A/N:** And here's the end of this short chapter, again I apologize for the long wait in updating. Also, the next school term is starting soon and I'm looking into universities, so that will take most of my time. But don't worry, I'm planning on finishing this story, even if by the end I only have one person reading it, (because of the long waits between updates) I'll be finishing it for that one person.******

****Until next time, C'ya all :)****

16. Infiltrations

****The Next Great Journey****

****A/N:** And I'm back with a new chapter. Sorry for the long wait but computer problems and University hunting kind of takes free time away hehe. Thanks again to everyone who clicked favorite or follow and also to the ones that took the time to post a review.******

****IMPORTANT NOTICE #1:** I want to thank Lord Izanagi for Beta read the chapter for all my grammatical errors, Thank you very much.******

****IMPORTANT NOTICE#2:** The Codex is no longer being updated because most of the relevant information is already there.******

"Speaking"

'Thoughts'

[Radio Communications, Ground forces-Ground forces, and Ship-Ship]

{Ground-Ship Communications}

Flash back of previous chapter(s)

Flash Back

'Messages on Screen'

Sound Effects

Line Break just shows a change of scenery.

DISCLAIMER: I don't own Halo, Mass Effect, or Mass Effect Paragon Lost; both belong to their respective owners.

Now onto the chapter.

Chapter 16: Infiltration

January 1, 2173, 1325 Hours, Citadel Council Calendar, Serpent Nebula, Widow System, Citadel Station, Presidium, Councilor Valern Chamber.

[The results of the project are promising. We still need more test material in order to improve them, as well as more funds, councilor,] a Salarian said via holographic communication.

"I see. I'll deposit more credits in one of the arranged accounts. On another note, what is the status of our other project?" Valern asked.

[The probes had managed to map the system and two nearby systems. One of them contains three colonies and is heavily fortified,] at this, the holographic representation of said system appeared with two planets and a moon highlighted in green, [the other system, we suspect that is some kind of military stronghold.]

"Suspect?"

[We had to maintain the probes at the edge of the system or risk detection. We have estimated that there is around a total of forty-five ships guarding the system, twelve of which are concentrated in one of the moons of the inner planets. Four of them are Stalwart-class frigates, three are Destroyers, another three are Heavy Destroyers and the last two ships are unknown at this range.]

"I see. Keep observing that stronghold. When the moment is right, see if you can send some STG agents to that moon for a recon operation. Strictly observation, and make sure that we aren't detected by any means."

[Of course, Councilor. Also there's another thing regardingâ€¦] What?

Can you repeat that?] the Salarian said as he checked his Omni-tool.

"What's happening? Mordin, respond."

Looking back at the Councilor, Mordin responded, [Councilor, I'm afraid that one of our STG bases was infiltrated.]

"What? Why wasn't I informed of this before?"

[STG on the base informs me that when they discovered the hacking, all communications were jammed on the base. By the time that they recovered communications, the infiltrators had already escaped by unknown means.]

"Look into it, I want to know what exactly happened and how can we prevent another occurrence. I want the final report in my terminal in ninety-two hours. Also, inform all of the STG bases to proceed with the appropriate countermeasures immediately. Until we know what exactly happened, all bases are under maximum alert."

[Understood, Councilor,] Mordin said before disconnecting the line.

Valern sighed in annoyance before moving to other pressing matters. He needed to negotiate with the Volus ambassador in order to gain more economic support for his research projects. Pressing the communicator on his desk, Valern said to the one in charge of reception, "Tell the Volus ambassador that I'll be seeing him now."

[Understood, Councilor.]

****January 1, 2173, 1230 Hours, Citadel Council Calendar, Serpent Nebula, Widow System, Citadel Station, C-Sec Headquarters.****

Garrus Vakarian was annoyed as he walked through the hallways of C-Sec towards the detention area. He had planned to spend the day with his family, being that it was the New Year, but all his plans were ruined when C-Sec solicited his presence in order to interrogate a recent inmate. Apparently, the inmate refused to talk to anyone except him.

Taking the last turn, Garrus spotted a pair of security guards outside the interrogation room. Nearby, at the one way window, stood the previous interrogator of the inmate.

"What's the situation, detective?" Garrus asked.

"The prisoner was apprehended after we discovered him buying and supplying illegal weapons on the station."

"Did you captured anyone else?"

"Two more, both low ranks within their organization. Their job was basically transportation. This guy, on the other handâ€¦|" The detective signaled Garrus to follow to another table.

Once there, he took one of the data-pads on the table and passed it to Garrus. Activating the data-pad, Garrus looked inquisitively to

the other detective, who only nodded in confirmation. "I'm going in."

Entering the interrogation room, Garrus saw the Human sitting without a care in the world. He almost looked like he wanted to be there.

"You seem comfortable hereâ€¦| Mr. Messner," Garrus said as he looked at the data-pad once again.

"What can I say, this chair is comfortable enough, and I got to see the inside of C-Sec, something that not everyone on the station has done before."

"So, what are you doing on the Citadel? I imagine that this wasn't just a simple visit."

"What? Can't a guy just look around the station?"

"Let's see, caught selling and buying illegal weapons, as well as being in possession of illegal drugs, a false I.D. and, let's not forget, have affiliation with the terrorist group known as CERBERUS," Garrus listed off from the data-pad.

"Ah!" Messner said with fake surprise, "Well, can't say that I'm innocent, but you got one fact wrong."

"Really? And what may that fact be?"

"CERBERUS isn't a terrorist group."

"Past events beg to differ with your claim, Mr. Messner, now what are you REALLY doing on the Citadel?"

"Tell me something, Detective Vakarian," Messner said, ignoring Garrus' question, "if CERBERUS is a terrorist organization, why is it that the last time that we were here, we let all those civilians live? It would had been easier to just deploy a poisonous gas through the vents systems than develop a knock out gas that doesn't have everlasting side effects on its victims, and let's not forget the fact that the gas wasn't lethal to any of the species affected by it."

Garrus opened his mouth to respond, but stopped midway. Messner had just pointed out a very interesting and true point about that attack. Before Garrus could respond, Messner continued.

"Also, during that attack by CERBERUS, our operatives didn't cause as much damage to the station as C-Sec did. We may be a questionable organization, but we don't kill innocent bystanders. Something to think about, don't you think, detective? I believe that I'm done talking for now, I'll see you again in a pair of hours or so. Have a nice day, detective Vakarian," Messner said with a triumphant smirk.

True to his word, Messner didn't speak again during the rest of the interrogation. Being annoyed with the lack of progress, Garrus exited the interrogation room, all the while remembering the day of the attack and analyzing every detail that he could remember of it. 'What the heck did I get myself into now?' Garrus thought as he went

towards his office.

****XXXXX****

Elsewhere on a rooftop close to C-Sec headquarters, a pair of snipers watched Messner in the interrogation room, while the other one observed the building, waiting for an opening to call in the extraction team. The maintenance room providing an excellent vantage point to observe and, if needed, eliminate possible targets. The infrared scope only made their job even easier.

****January 1, 2575, 0300 Hours, Systems Alliance Calendar, Ismar Frontier, Sector 22-D between Systems, Approaching STG R&D Base, CERBERUS Stealth Phantom.****

The Phantom approached the floating station between systems, the only thing indicating its presence being the slight change of gravity, because of its mass effect fields, around the station. Approaching stealthily with its camouflage active, the Phantom passed unnoticed by the sensors of the probes surrounding the station.

Inside the Phantom, Miranda Lawson checked her equipment one more time. This being her first mission, she was a bit nervous but nonetheless confident in her abilities. What worried her the most was the insertion method that was going to be used: the Phantom was to approach at a distance of three-hundred kilometers from the station, just outside the mass effect fields of the station. Once in position, she was going to be deployed and move to the station using the jetpack on her Phantom suit, while the mass effect fields will serve as another impulse to her.

[Twenty seconds until we're on position, over,] the pilot announced.

Standing up, Miranda activated the magnetic boots of her suit. After a few seconds, a green light turned on inside the Phantom just before one of the doors on the side opened. Once the door fully opened, Miranda deactivated the magnetic boots, letting the depressurization of the ship launch her towards the station at high speeds. Meanwhile, the Phantom closed its door before going silent once again.

Using the thruster of her jetpack, Miranda evaded the few ships patrolling the station as well as the occasional trash of the ships and the station. After a few minutes of repeating the process, Miranda finally landed on the station; activating the magnetic locks on the boots of the suit, she proceeded to move to the closest airlock. Locating the terminal of the airlock, Miranda took out a decrypting device. Plugging it in on the terminal, she waited a few seconds before the airlock's door turned green and opened. After opening the second door of the airlock, and closing the door to the exterior of the base, Miranda activated her suit's camouflage before moving through the station silently and slowly.

'That was easier than I thought,' Miranda mused as she passed a pair of patrolling Salarians, 'now to locate the central computer of the station.' Moving ahead, Miranda entered the room from which the two Salarians had come from. Locating a nearby terminal, she activated her Omni-tool in tandem with her VI assistant to start downloading a map of the station, as well as the communication's frequency without being detected by the system's defenses.

****January 1, 2575, 1100 Hours, Systems Alliance Calendar, Athena Nebula, Parnitha System, Thessia.****

"You know, for a pacifist inclined species, the Asari sure are paranoid when it comes to other species visiting their home planet," Jacob commented.

"That's the reason why this planet has so low crime and violence rates even though its population is extremely high," Kai Leng said in a lecturing tone.

Chuckling to himself, Jacob kept conducting the sky-car towards the Temple of Athame. According to CERBERUS spies on Thessia, the Temple of Athame is strictly under the government's watch and constant scientific studies during non-public hours. Thus the reason why CERBERUS command sent them to investigate if there is anything of importance inside or around the temple.

"Hmm, well this is interesting," Kai Leng said suddenly.

"What is it?" Jacob asked.

"Our scanner is picking up high concentrations of bioelectric signatures similar in frequency to the bioelectric waves of the brain. They are coming from somewhere inside the temple."

"Do you think that that may be what we are looking for?"

"It could be, but it could also be a high concentration of biotics inside the temple."

Parking the sky-car, both agents proceeded to enter the temple. The inside of the temple was extensive, a big chamber with many artifacts, statues, and drawings on rocks were on the sides of the chamber, while all the way to the back in the middle, a giant statue stood of what Jacob and Kai Leng presumed to be the goddess Athame. Similar statues could be found in the back corners of the temple as well.

Guides guided small groups, mostly consisting of kids, throughout the temple, explaining the significance of every artifact inside it. Matriarchs and scientists studied the many artifacts on the side walls or were sitting on the benches praying and/or looking for some kind of spiritual guidance. Following the signature of the bioelectric energy through the scanner on his eyeglasses, Kai Leng guided Jacob towards the statue of Athame.

"Seems like the concentration of energy is stronger on the statue," Kai Leng said.

"That might present a problem, if the statue itself is the one giving those readings or if it's just a cover, we won't be able to thoroughly analyze it without looking suspicious," Jacob said.

"The best that we can do is keep looking around for more clues and report back to command. If the Asari are hiding something here, we won't be able to discover what it is without revealing our presence."

Both agents proceeded to move around the temple, looking into every artifact inside that could give them a clue as to what was generating the bioelectric energy.

"It is surprising to see members of other species to come visit this temple," someone suddenly said next to Jacob.

Looking to his side, Jacob spotted an Asari studying the artifact next to the statue that he was looking at.

"I didn't realize that the temple was off limits to tourists," Jacob responded, slightly confused.

"Oh no! I didn't mean it like that. It's just that there aren't many who are interested in the historic aspects of other species," she responded quickly.

"I see," Jacob responded, understanding, "So, are you a member of this temple?"

"No, I'm actually an archeologist. Mostly specializing with studies on the Prothean civilization."

"An archeologist? Well I can't say that I expected to meet one on here. So, think that you could give me and my friend over there a history lesson in some of these artifacts?"

Looking to where Jacob pointed, the Asari spotted another human looking over one of the sculptures. Looking back at Jacob, she smiled and responded, "It would be my pleasure."

"Thank you, miss?"

"T'Soni, Dr. Liara T'Soni."

"A pleasure, Dr. T'Soni; I'm Jacob Smith, and my friend over there is Kai Nguyen."

Both of them proceeded to move towards Kai's position before the unofficial tour started, with the two agents listening for anything of importance.

****January 1, 2173, 1440 Hours, Citadel Council Calendar, Serpent Nebula, Widow System, Citadel Station, C-Sec Headquarters.****

Inside the interrogation room Messner could be found sleeping soundlessly on what he now considered his chair, while two guards kept an eye on him. Suddenly the door to the interrogation room opened, letting Garrus inside. Nodding at the guards, Garrus approached the prisoner as the guard exited.

"Wake up," Garrus said as he bumped Messner's chair a bit. Once Messner was completely awake, Garrus continued, "Now Mr. Messner, you are going to tell me what you are really doing on the Citadel."

"Or what? You are going to torture me until I answer?" Messner responded with a smirk.

"It's a possibility, after all no one besides me and three others know that you are here."

"Well, would you look at that, keeping my presence a secret. I feel honored."

"Let's stop with the dramatics, now tell me, why are you on the Citadel? What does CERBERUS want now?"

"What CERBERUS wants and what the council wants is not that different, after all, both of us are looking out for the welfare of our respective citizens."

"So you are telling me that CERBERUS wants to protect the Systems Alliance? Do you honestly believe that I'll buy that? Now, I'm not going to ask again, tell me, what are you doing on the Citadel?"

"You know, detective, I really hoped that this conversation could last longer, but I'm afraid that I'm short of time."

"What do youâ€|?" A sudden explosion on one of the walls of the interrogation room interrupted Garrus.

The two guards from earlier immediately entered the room, as CERBERUS Phantom soldiers entered through the hole. The guards immediately opened fire as Garrus reached for his pistol. One of the Phantoms activated a bubble shield, effectively protecting everyone and everything inside it, meanwhile Messner used the temporary distraction to move towards the awaiting grapnels.

"Thanks for the stay, but I'm afraid that I have other business to attend to. Will see you again soon, Detective Vakarian," Messner shouted as he took the grapnel and started grappling down the building, the Phantoms following suit short after.

"Quick, contact all nearby units, tell them that CERBERUS agents are escaping C-Sec headquarters," Garrus ordered the two guards.

Nodding, the two of them were about to run out towards the nearest terminal when suddenly a shot could be heard, followed by one of them falling to the floor, the other following soon after. Seeing this, Garrus took cover behind the flipped table on the room.

Meanwhile down at the street level, Messner and the Phantoms boarded a pair of sky-cars, immediately taking off through the crowded and bustling streets. Inside the sky-car part of the front glass lit up, showing the image of a star behind the shadow of a man.

[Mr. Messner,] the Illusive Man simply said.

"Illusive Man," Messner replied, "The primary objective was achieved, though I wasn't able to complete the deal with the local mercenary groups."

[I see. In any case, your mission parameters have changed, we are sending you to Illium. My sources are telling me that a high ranking agent of the Shadow Broker is currently there, I want you to contact that agent and establish a deal of sorts. I'll send you the details once you are there.]

With that, T.I.M. cut the transmission.

****January 1, 2575, 0445 Hours, Systems Alliance Calendar, Ismar Frontier, Sector 22-D between Systems, STG R&D Base.****

It had taken some time, but Miranda was finally close to her objective. Surprisingly the base had more security measures than initially thought, but it wasn't surprising if the rumors of the STG were to be believed. Hiding behind some crates, Miranda observed the two patrol guards as they passed, accompanied by a FENRIS-MEC. Making sure that her tactical cloak wasn't on the verge of timing out, she moved towards the opened door from which the patrol came through before it closed behind her.

She entered what she presumed to be a secondary command center of sorts with a checkpoint in the back of the room. Currently there were only four agents, all of them revising their terminals. Locating the surveillance cameras in the room, Miranda fired a hacking ship to each one of them, replacing the live feed with the one taken over the last three hours.

Once the cameras were unutilized she took out her silenced pistol, firing a pair of darts to the pair of guards facing the checkpoint. The bodies impacting the floor caught the attention of the other two in the room, but once they turned around to check on the odd sound, they too dropped to the floor unconscious. Miranda approached one of the knocked out agents, and taking out a rounded device, she started scanning the retina of the Salarian, followed by taking his fingerprints.

Using the fingerprints and the retina scan, Miranda gained access to the server room, which was connected to the central computer through some cable tunnels.

"Alright Lenox, time for you to work," Miranda said to the AI accompanying her.

"Just insert me on the drone already, I have been bored to the death for the past two hours," Lenox commented exaggeratedly.

Rolling her eyes in exasperation at Lenox's antics, Miranda inserted the AI chip on the small infiltration drone. Lenox immediately took control of it and started to move it through the cable tunnel while Miranda planted some bugs on the server room. Once on the other side, Lenox moved towards the central computer, immediately plugging himself on it to start the hacking.

[Starting to download files now,] Lenox informed Miranda, [you know, with the level of cyber security that these guys have, I almost feel bad about doing this.]

[Just do your job, we aren't here to comment on their level of security,] Miranda responded uninterested.

[You know, you need to brighten up a little bit more during missions. Keep going like this and suddenly you will be regarded as the boring companion of any group that you are assigned with.]

[Lenox.]

[Okay, okay. The download is complete and the virus is already on their system. Once anyone on the station, beside us of course, interacts with the systems of any ship with their Omni-tool it will be infected as well. Provided that they don't discover the virus first, of course.]

[Good, then let's go.]

Lenox disconnected himself from the system before commanding the drone to take him back to Miranda's position. Back in the server room, Miranda took the drone with Lenox before moving towards the closest airlock. Once she exited the control room, with her camouflage activated, Miranda took the left staircase which according to her map, should take her towards a nearby airlock.

The door to the airlock was unguarded and as such was easy to open. Letting the door close, Miranda opened the secondary door, allowing herself to be thrown towards space. Using the small thrusters, she directed her movements towards the coordinates of the Phantom awaiting her.

The Phantom itself opened its side door to let Miranda in, which thanks to her thrusting she managed to slow down her descent into. Once Miranda was inside, the Phantom took off at FTL speeds away from the base and the ships guarding it. It will take an hour for the STG agents to discover the knocked out agents and another hour to discover the virus infecting all of their systems in the station.

****January 1, 2575, 1300 Hours, Systems Alliance Calendar, Athena Nebula, Parnitha System, Thessia.****

"It was a pleasure meeting you two, I hope to see you again in the near future," Liara said as she and her two companions exited the temple.

"The pleasure was ours, maybe we can meet again tomorrow and continue the tour?" Jacob said pleasantly.

Meanwhile Kai started the sky-car, awaiting for his companion to finish the conversation with the doctor. While the tour had been informative in the history of Asari culture, it didn't have much relevance to what they had hoped to learn on the temple. Though it still served as a good way to distract the other people in the temple while he and Jacob planted surveillance cameras and microphones around the site.

"We are clear to go, Kai," Jacob said as he boarded the sky-car.

"This fast? I thought that you would ask her out," Kai commented with a smirk as he took off towards the skies.

Rolling his eyes, Jacob decided to ignore the comment, opting instead to activate the sky-car's computer and check that the surveillance devices were online.

"Seems like all those cameras and microphones are working. With this surveillance we should find out what is it that the Asari are hiding in there."

"Unless whatever it is that they are hiding is underground. I would like to come back during the night and inspect the temple more in depth."

"I don't think that that is a good idea. Security is heavy on the night according to our contacts, and every entrance has scanners. So even if you use a cloak device you will be detected, and hacking the security will be next to impossible. I checked the surveillance cameras of the temple, and the security around it is of military grade."

"I thought that we were the ones with superior cyber technology," Kay said confused by Jacob's claim.

"We are, but even so, we would need a smart AI to get past one of the security systems undetected, and even then there's the matter of all the inside security which is running on a different channel. We can't hack one without alerting the other and smuggling two AIs on Thessia will alert unnecessary attention."

"Okay I get it, we can't do anything besides observe and wait with what we have."

The rest of the way to their apartment was spent in silence. Kai contemplating how to proceed in a way to get more information but without unnecessary risk. Meanwhile Jacob occupied his mind making sure that each and every last one of the surveillance systems worked one hundred percent right.

****January 5, 2173, 1700 Hours, Citadel Council Calendar, Alliance Occupied System, STG Stealth Ship.****

"Systems are functioning. Stealth functions are operational. Sir, we are hidden from the long range scanners in the system," a Salarian said.

"Understood, start observation mode and send a small team towards our target."

The ship remained immobile on space, hiding its heat signals as well as under a partial cloaking device which made the ship invisible to the naked eye if the ship stayed still with most of its systems turned off. It had taken the Salarian scientist years to manage such a feat, but once accomplished, small ships like this one were deployed to hostile territories to observe and send messages to STG headquarters of what's happening. Of course in case they were discovered, the ship was equipped with the fastest FTL drive that the Salarian Union had for a fast escape, and in order to protect their government and the Citadel by extension, the Delatras and sometimes the Council, if the latter was informed of the operation, would disavow any knowledge of the operation and mark them as rough ex-agents of any organization that they belonged to.

The hatch of the ship opened, letting the small stealth shuttle exit the bigger ship.

"Stealth engines report online. Sir, we are ready to enter the red zone."

"Understood, take the shuttle towards the indicated moon. Avoid all unnecessary risks and prevent detection at all costs."

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Several hours later, the shuttle landed undetected on the moon having barely passed the red zone without being detected, and that was because the shuttle had to appear as an asteroid for some time in several occasions. The method was simple, turn off all systems, including vital support and let the shuttle drift with the motion that it still carried. The Salarians inside the shuttle had already prepared themselves for this situation, having their suits already on and activating the oxygen modules when life support was deactivated.

Exiting the shuttle, three STG agents stepped on the alien surface of the moon. Not having the luxury of making a throughout scan of the moon, the topography of the moon's surface had to be made with telescopes and precise laser measurements, thus making the map they had slightly off but not enough to not be functional.

The three agents moved north of their position, towards what was identified as a military base of sorts. The terrain of the moon offered some hiding places like caves, and big rock formations that made them harder to find by the Alliance surface patrols, though air patrols by Banshees and Falcons would be able to spot them easily if they didn't hide good enough.

[Stop,] one of the Salarians said suddenly. [Take cover, a warthog is coming this way.]

The other two obeyed and moved to a nearby cave. Once inside, the three of them waited for the warthog to pass by, only for it to drop a pair of soldiers in the area before moving along.

"Did you hear?" one of the soldiers said as he surveilled the area.

"Heard what?" the other one asked.

"Apparently our ambassadors on the Citadel are trying to convince the Council of recognizing Alliance AIs as fellow citizens."

"Really? I thought that their phobia for synthetics will make them say a definite no to that request."

"Well, nothing is concrete yet, but the Council is willing to listen to us. If we manage to present enough evidence to convince them and the public within Citadel space that AIs aren't a threat, we won't have to go through all that paper work every time that a ship of ours enters Citadel space."

"I'm sure that the higher ups are thrilled for this to happen, I mean, that way we would be able to establish a "colony" within their space without too many problems."

The three STG agents looked at each other as the two Alliance soldiers started to move back towards the incoming warthog. Seeing how the Alliance looked this militarized in this system, it was safe

to assume that this colony that the marines were talking about was more as a front for another goals, though they could be wrong, there was no harm in taking precautions just in case.

Once the warthog departed, the three agents kept moving, following the marks left behind by the warthog's tires. It took them another two hours to get within visual range of the base and another half hour to locate a good observation position, far enough to not be easily detected but close enough to have a good view of the base's activities. Thus, the first of many STG operations begun, all of them focused on discovering the mystery that the Alliance presented behind its borders.

"Is the recording equipment ready?"

"Affirmative. Everything looks functional. Sir, are we going to go into to the base?"

"Negative, not until we collect more data on the base's activities, then we will infiltrate the base. For now though we will only observe. Remember, from now on, until the next team arrives, we are on our own. The captain of the ship just sent a message saying that he was leaving the system to pick up the next team."

The other two Salarians nodded, mentally preparing for the isolation that was to come.

January 7, 2575, 1600 Hours, System Alliance Calendar, Horsehead Nebula, Unknown System, Cronos Station.

Looking at the show displayed by the star on the system, T.I.M. opened one of the reports sent to him by one of the many cells of the organization. According to it, it appeared that another installation had been discovered by Citadel SPECTRES and destroyed. Though the installation's database was wiped out before any non-Alliance citizen got to it, what worried T.I.M. was the fact that two of the frigates guarding it were destroyed as well.

It seemed that Citadel forces had made up in technological advantage with sheer numbers, deciding to overwhelm the enemy ships and take them out as fast as possible. T.I.M. knew that the Citadel possessed more ships at its disposal than the Alliance, and if provoked they could scar the Alliance badly.

Sending a message to another cell focused on R&D, T.I.M. prepared a report for high command, knowing that his next course of action could raise many questions amongst the civilian population if the matter wasn't handled carefully. And even if high command decided to not take action, the project was already in motion and he would have to continue it on in secret.

A/N: And there's another chapter finished. I know that it is a short chapter, but the next one will be longer and more action packed. From now on I recommend to pay more attention to the dates on each setting change, that way you won't be lost on the oncoming chapters. Until next time C'ya.

****The Next Great Journey****

****A/N:** And I'm back with a new chapter. Sorry for the long wait, but University inscriptions takes more time than I initially thought, (that and school work). So my recommendation for you people, if you are planning on going to college, start looking into it with at least two years of anticipation, especially the inscription process.**

****Thanks again to everyone who clicked favorite and/or follow and also to the ones that took the time to post a review.****

****IMPORTANT NOTICE #1:** I want to thank Word Worthy for Beta read the chapter for all my grammatical errors, Thank you very much.**

****IMPORTANT NOTICE#2:** The Codex is no longer being updated because most of the relevant information is already there.**

"Speaking"

'Thoughts'

[Radio Communications, Ground forces-Ground forces, and Ship-Ship]

{Ground-Ship Communications}

Flashback of previous chapter(s)

Flash Back

'Messages on Screen'

****Sound Effects****

Line Break just shows a change of scenery.

****DISCLAIMER:** I don't own Halo, Mass Effect, or Mass Effect Paragon Lost; they belong to their respective owners.**

*****Please read the Author's note at the end of the chapter once you finish reading.****

Now onto the chapter.

Chapter 17: The Race

****January 6, 2173, 1800 Hours, Citadel Council Calendar, Serpent Nebula, Widow System, Citadel Station, Presidium, SPECTRES Information Room, Weapons Testing Area.****

The sound of the rapid firing of the Phaeston rifle could be heard throughout the room. The weapon was taking out each target presented by the testing room, each target modified to be more resistant to certain types of weapons or types of ammunition. Recharging the weapon, Saren equipped the explosive ammo to his rifle. The explosive ammo, while not too useful against shields, was specifically designed to deal great amounts of damage to unshielded targets, as well as

targets using armor or barriers as protection, though the small explosion that the bullet sparked microseconds after impact served as a good distraction to targets using shields.

Satisfied with the modification that he had made to his rifle, Saren decided to take a break. Putting the rifle in his weapons locker, Saren checked a nearby terminal, looking for any message or assignment worthy of his skills. All the while, he was thinking about what the doctors said to him nearly a week ago.

****December 30, 2172, 1450 Hours, Citadel Council Calendar, Serpent Nebula, Widow System, Citadel Station, Huerta Memorial Hospital.****

"What's my status of readiness, doctor? Am I ready to go back into the field?" Saren asked the Salarian doctor.

"Your mental stability seems fine for the most part," the Salarian began.

"The most part?" Saren interrupted.

"Yes, nothing that a few hours of sleep can't cure, but, as I was saying," the doctor continued as he showed a diagram of sorts in one of the screens on the room, "your cerebral activity is off the charts. I'm assuming that this has something to do with your interaction with the Prothean beacon. Subconsciously, your mind is in chaos trying to decipher whatever information it is that the beacon dumped on you."

"Then what can I do toâ€¦ put my mind in a calmer state?"

"For the moment: nothing but coming back here regularly for a mental check."

"There has to be something else, doctor! Something that can put me back on the field as soon as possible." Saren said, growing irritated.

"I'm sorry, but this is all that we can do at the moment. I even asked one of the Asari doctors to see if she could do a more thorough analysis of your mind, but once she saw the diagrams she was surprised that you didn't have any secondary effects. Thus the reason why she, or any other Asari doctors, will not attempt to meld mentally with you, the risk is too high and could even cause several mental damage to them and you."

Saren stayed still in the bed, trying to process what the doctor had said to him. Hours passed as he tried to find a way to solve this particular problem without causing more damage to himself. 'There has to be a way toâ€¦ decipher this message that was dumped into me. Maybe that is the answer to get rid of this mental condition of mine, but how? How do I decipher this? I must be missing something.'

****January 6, 2173, 1820 Hours, Citadel Council Calendar, Serpent Nebula, Widow System, Citadel Station, Presidium, SPECTRES Information Room.****

Looking at the messages on the terminal, Saren decided to wonder in

those thoughts at a later time. Looking through the list of news updates and other assignments that needed SPECTRE's clearances to proceed, Saren spotted one that called his attention. The message said:

_ 'Actualization on the Terminus Systems, _

_ Several ships, which had been confirmed of belonging to the Heretic Geth and the Loyalists Covenant, have been spotted in the Hourglass Nebula. The report came from a small group of Eclipse mercenaries that where on the system before being attacked by numerous unidentified ships similar to those used by the Geth and the Alliance. The survivors informed us that the unidentified ships opened fire on the Eclipse ships protecting the planet before landing. The civilians of the planet reported that the " now identified " Loyalist group had set a foothold on the forest surrounding the city for several days before departing._

_ The Systems Alliance has been informed of this development and is currently investigating the system and all the systems nearby inside the Hourglass Nebula. All available SPECTRES are tasked to keep an eye out for any suspicious activity inside the Terminus which could lead to the Loyalists' and the Heretics' whereabouts. All information obtained is to be reported to the Council directly and the Alliance search groups._

_ Authorized by Councilor Valern. '_

'What could the Loyalists and the Heretics be doing in the middle of a forest? Could it be that there was something valuable in there that we didn't know of?' Saren thought to himself, 'And even if there is something of value in there, why would they want it, unless,' Opening his eyes wide in realization, Saren went to his weapons locker. Taking out a bag, he started to put his weapons and armor in it before departing the information room and running towards the elevator.

'If my suspicions are right, then the Prophet was in that forest looking for something that could help decipher the message that the beacon dropped in both of us.' The elevator's doors opened, letting Saren into the docking area. He boarded his personal shuttle, using his SPECTRE clearance to leave the station without too many questions being asked. Once outside the city limits of the Citadel, he made a move towards the relay.

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[Eagle-one, Eagle-three, here. The target is on the move towards the docking bay. I'm following and awaiting further instructions, over,] a Kig-Yar said as he took the elevator down towards the docking area.

[Understood, Eagle-three, Eagles-two and four have been informed already and are watching the skies, keep the target under your sights and inform us if he takes any ship out of the station, over.]

[Roger that, over.]

Arriving at the docking area, the Kig-Yar exited the elevator, immediately locating Saren around the reception area. He watched as

Saren discussed some things with someone in reception before using his SPECTRE status to move on towards an awaiting ship. He followed closely, mixing himself between the crowds while preparing a tracker.

Just as Saren boarded the shuttle, he put the tracker on the back of the small ship before leaving the area inconspicuously.

[The target is on the move in a red Kodiak shuttle with black marks on the sides.]

[Understood, is the tracker active?]

[Affirmative.]

[Lay low, Eagle-three, Eagles-two and four are taking it from here, over.]

With that, the agent went to his own business, mixing himself once again within the crowds before disappearing. Outside, a sky-car followed the unsuspecting shuttle towards the limits of the city, making sure that the tracker's frequency was active and responding. The occupants of the sky-car let the target leave the Citadel before hailing a nearby ship, sending it the frequency of the tracker.

Looking at his terminal, Eagle-one saw as a dot appeared in a stellar map, moving from one relay to another, the destination in which the Serpent Nebula's relay sent the ship being calculated by the ship's VI.

"Sir, we have a destination point for our target. He's moving towards the Hourglass Nebula, the estimated arrival time is somewhere within eight hours."

"Understood, send a message to our ships in there, tell them to keep an eye on him but to not interfere unless absolutely necessary. In the meantime, tell your team to focus on their secondary objectives."

"Of course, sir," the ONI agent said as he started relaying commands to his team.

January 7, 2575, 0220 Hours, Systems Alliance Calendar, Hourglass Nebula, UNSC-Class Stalwart Light Frigate **_Fair Weather**_**.

"How's the progress of the search teams?" Captain Frederick Stuart asked.

"One of the teams has a possible lead as to what the Loyalist and Heretics were doing here. Besides that, nothing else has been reported," Raven responded.

"Understood," Stuart said tiredly, "With all of the ships searching the nebula, one would think that we would find something by now."

"Sir, a ship is entering the system through the relay."

"Raven," Stuart said, turning to look at the AI, "you know the procedure."

"Of course, Captain," Raven said before opening a channel to the incoming ship, [Unidentified vessel, you are entering temporary Systems Alliance space. Identify yourself and state your intentions, or return through the relay immediately. Failure to comply will result in the capture of your ship until further notice. You have five minutes to respond or leave the system, over.]

A few seconds passed before the unidentified ship responded, [I'm Citadel SPECTRE Saren Arterius, and I'm here to help in the search of the Loyalist and Heretics ships that were sighted on the system, over.]

[Noted, please send your identification as a SPECTRE through the channel and wait for further instructions.]

"Another SPECTRE, huh? Raven, is he who he claims he is?" Stuart asked.

"Affirmative, Captain, do I inform ONI of his arrival?"

"Do it and let them take it from here."

Raven nodded before flickering out of visual existence. A few minutes passed before the ship in which Saren was boarded continued moving towards the planet, and unknown to the SPECTRE, another small camouflaged craft followed close by.

Entering through the planet's atmosphere, Saren took the time to look at the information collected throughout the search on the planet's surface. Locating a point of interest, Saren took his shuttle towards the middle of the forest. Landing the craft, Saren moved towards the wildness of the forest, managing to see a few Varren in the distance before moving on towards the former landing area of the Loyalist/Heretic fleet.

The SPECTRE moved through the thick brush with his rifle ready for use. Using the map on his Omni-tool, Saren approached the Alliance camp that was situated on the landing zone until one of the patrols spotted him. Showing his identification, Saren moved towards the command center of the camp.

"Sir, SPECTRE Saren Arterius is here to help with the search," one of the marines guarding the command center said.

Looking at the SPECTRE, the general made a come-in signal before speaking, "Here to help, huh? Alright, you can start by helping the investigators over in Sector 5. That's where our newest lead is now."

"Of course," Saren responded.

"Look, I know that you SPECTRES like to do things your way and all, but here you are under Systems Alliance jurisdiction, you have to follow the rules or I will kick you out of this investigation, understood?" the general said with a sharp glance.

Saren only nodded at that before leaving the command center and

boarding a warthog to get to his destination.

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After an hour or so of riding the warthog, Saren finally arrived at his destination. Exiting the vehicle, Saren moved towards the center of the investigation.

The abandoned enemy camp had nothing much to offer in terms of notability besides a handful of terminals scattered around. The few people in the area that were investigating, focused mainly on said terminals; Saren on the other hand, moved towards what appeared to be the landing area of some ship.

The grass on the landing area had different kinds of marks, an indication of various vehicles passing through the area, but strangely, most of the marks led towards the forest.

"Has anyone looked into these tracks?" Saren asked a nearby investigator.

"Yea, we sent scouts a while ago. They said that the tracks ended in a clearing a few miles north of here."

"I see. Thank you."

Looking at the path again, Saren stood up and followed the tracks to the edge of the forest, seeing some of the trees on the floor or to the sides, as if making a road. Seeing as how everyone else was occupied looking into the field, Saren ventured into the forest, weapon ready in case an animal decided to make him into its dinner. After some minutes of following the tracks, Saren arrived at the clearing mentioned by the investigator, and just as he had said, the tracks ended there. Activating his Omni-tool, Saren scanned the area for possible clues as to why the tracks ended so suddenly.

"Just as I thought, nothing. Why did I thought that coming here would be a good idea?" Saren said to himself as he turned to leave.

But just as he turned, a Varren attacked him, throwing him to the floor with the animal on top of him. Using his armored arm to stop the Varren from biting his face, Saren reached for his knife with the other hand. Once the knife was in his possession, he stabbed the Varren in the eye, killing it instantly.

The Varren fell to the side as Saren stood back up. He immediately noticed that during the fight he had moved away from the main road. Sighting to himself, Saren started walking back to the camp, or that would have been the plan if the floor hadn't given in beneath him so suddenly, dragging him underground.

"By the spirits. Why do bad things keep happening to me?" he asked to no one while looking around. "Seems like I'm in some sort of tunnel, and with no signal it appears," he said while checking his Omnitool, "I wonder, to where does this tunnel leads?" Shaking his anxiety off, Saren ventured into the cave, looking for a way out.

****Age of Resurrection, Loyalist Covenant Calendar, Relay Network,
CSO-Class Supercarrier **_**Vengeance Coming**_**, Bridge.****

Jul 'Mdama watched the holographic image of the target that his fleet was about to attack. According to the Geth's files, the installation had multiple access points that his troops could use to enter the city, but the only problem was that the fleet that the Prophet of Vengeance ordered to come wasn't large enough for an operation of this magnitude. He knew this, and most of his men also knew that the battle to come will result in a close victory if nothing unexpected happened.

Looking at his personal data-pad, Jul couldn't prevent the pleased expression that came to his face. 'If the Prophet doesn't want to listen to reason, then his errors and blind trust in that thing will be his downfall,' Jul thought.

"Supreme Commander," Communications said, "Fleet Master Val X'Soon is contacting us."

"Put him on screen."

No sooner than Jul gave the order, and the holographic image of the Fleet Master appeared where the installation's hologram once stood.

[Supreme Commander, I'm glad to report that all of our ships' crews are in favor of your plan,] Val said.

"Excellent work, Fleet Master. Once the opportunity presents itself, your ship shall have the honor of striking that abomination down," Jul said pleased. "With the Prophet's downfall, the Covenant will once more rise at the top of galactic civilization. And all of those who oppose us will perish under our mighty fist."

[Of course Supreme Commander,] Val said with a slight bow. [But what about the Geth? Once we attack the abomination we will be in the middle of a free for all carnage. Do you want me to coordinate the fleet to open fire on the Geth once we strike the Prophet?]

"That will not be necessary. By the time the Geth realize that we struck that god of theirs down, the Alliance would have arrived, giving us the window to enter slip-space and escape that nonsense of a battle."

[As you wish,] Val said before disconnecting the signal.

Jul smirked as he turned to his other duties, knowing that in a few hours he would be the one in control of the Covenant once again.

****January 7, 2173, 0400 Hours, Systems Alliance Calendar, Hourglass Nebula, Daratar, Underground.****

The tunnel proved to be part of an extensive tunnel system, similar to those made by the Rachni on their homeworld. Having heard the stories of the Rachni war, Saren couldn't prevent the feeling of dread spreading through him like a virus, even though he knew that the Rachni went extinct centuries ago. As he moved further inside the tunnel, the walls looked less rocky in nature and more metallic in some places.

"There must be some kind of volcanic activity down here, which would

most likely explain the metamorphic formations on the walls. Though that means that I have to find an exit ASAP," Saren said to himself.

Following the naturally-made path, Saren continued like this for minutes, the pitch black illumination of the cave not helping with his orientation. The only ray of illumination being provided was from the small lantern attached to his rifle, as well as the night vision monocular that he had. Further into the tunnel, a body of some kind could be seen on the ground. Coming to a sudden stop, Saren inspected the body, noticing instantly that it was an Asari. It was an Asari with multiple claw marks on her body as well as a slightly familiar electric blackish-blue color on her skin.

"So you found the remains of my colleague," someone said suddenly.

Saren immediately raised his rifle at the voice's source, his lantern illuminating the unknown person before him just as fast. He immediately noticed that it was another Asari, older than the one that was dead by the looks of it.

"Who are you and what are you doing here?" Saren asked, not lowering his rifle from the unknown.

"I could ask you the same thing," she answered back. Seeing as Saren put his finger on the trigger of the weapon, she decided to answer his question, "I'm Matriarch Benezia from the Asari Republic. As to what I'm doing here, my colleague and I came a few weeks ago to investigate some ruins down here."

"Ruins? Of Prothean origin?" Saren asked as he lowered his weapon.

Shaking her head, Benezia answered, "No, these ruins are more recent and still of an unknown civilization. We had assumed," A sudden scream interrupted Benezia, putting Saren on edge once again, who was now frantically looking for the source of the scream.

"What was that?"

"Bad news. Come, we have to get out of here before it finds us," Benezia turned around and starting walking through one of the corridors of the tunnel, Saren following close behind.

"About your colleague, what happened to her?" Saren asked.

"She was captured by some creatures. When I saw her again, she wasn't herself anymore, so I had to kill her."

"So they can do that to other species too," Saren said to himself.

"What did you say?"

"Hmm, oh nothing. Just thinking out loud."

Benezia just looked at him oddly before continuing in her path, while the screams from the background lessened as they moved. Finally exiting the tunnel, both of them arrived inside a big cavern and in

the middle, an abandoned city stood. Buildings of up to three floors stood proudly, the rock of which they were made of having survived for the most part against the natural decay caused by time. Streets passed through the city in an organized way, all of them leading to the center where a temple of sorts resided.

Moving through one of the many streets, Saren marveled at the hidden city. The city itself looked like an archaic version of a modern city in Palaven. The buildings still contained furniture, tools, weapons, and in some cases, petrified food. The only strange thing that he could spot was the lack of bodies.

"What is this place?" he couldn't help but ask.

"The ruins that I mentioned before. Before the Loyalists and Heretics arrived, my team and I managed to date this place to around fifty thousand years since the city was abandoned. The city itself has around sixty-thousand years since it was built."

"How do you know that it was abandoned fifty thousand years ago?"

"The petrified food on the buildings. We checked all of the buildings and the food has around the same time since it was left there. To be honest, we aren't one-hundred percent sure that the inhabitants of the city abandoned the place. I believe that they were contacted by another species and then left with them, leaving all things behind like it was nothing."

"Excuse me if I don't believe that, it seems to me more like they were abducted or simply vanished by unknown reasons."

"Unsurprisingly you seem to have the same assumptions as most of my colleagues," She said as they started to ascend towards the temple. "Through here, I'll show you why I came to my particular theory."

Having nothing else to do at the moment, Saren checked his surroundings once more before following Benezia inside. The temple's inside was being illuminated by electric lights provided by the investigation team. The doors were taller than him by around fifty centimeters, a fact that he had just realized for all the doors in the city. Once he went through the door, the first thing that he saw was a big statue of what he assumed was an important figure for the locals of the city.

The statue was of a bipedal being, with a long tail, sharp claws and razor like teeth. In retrospective, it looked like a reptilian humanoid, and if the doors were any indication, they were also really tall beings, even taller than a Krogan at its prime. The walls surrounding the statue had carvings similar to the statue, as well as a group of another three individuals.

Entering the chamber that Benezia leaded him to, Saren spotted more drawings related to their culture and religious beliefs. But one of those drawings caught his attention, it was of the lizard like people, kneeling in front of what appeared to be an enormous octopus like being that was descending from the sky. Confusion crossed Saren's face before understanding, and finally shock settled in.

"So you do recognize that god of theirs?"

"Recognize? Of course I do, the entire Citadel and Alliance's scout teams are looking for it. What I can't get my head around is the fact that that ship was active fifty-thousand years ago."

"Do you know the legend of the Reapers?"

"Surely you don't mean that story used to scare kids..." At seeing Benezia's neutral expression, Saren sighted in disbelief. "Please tell me that you don't believe in that nonsense."

"I don't." Saren's face regained some hope, only to be crushed by Benezia's next statement. "At least I didn't until a few weeks ago. While the evidence here is not totally concrete, it has made me wonder if those stories have some truth to it."

"Are you listening to yourself, surely the isolation down here has gotten to you."

"I assure you," Benezia said sternly, "that my state of mind has not been affected. Now, to what I was explaining earlier, remember how I said that the entire city's population left with another species?" Seeing Saren nod, she continued, "Well, according to these drawings and those in the other chambers, the locals considered these beings as their gods. Also, in some of the texts that we found, we managed to decipher that they believed in some kind of spiritual ascension once their gods returned. It wouldn't be surprising if once they saw their gods arriving at the planet, the entire city moved towards them in order to venerate them or do something similar."

"What makes you so sure that these gods of theirs arrived onto this planet in the first place?" Saren countered, not liking where this was going.

"A few centuries ago, I had contact with one Prothean beacon situated on this planet. Just as you did back on Antida. Don't look so surprised, a report like the one for that particular operation isn't hard to come by for people with my kind of influence and connections."

"Wait, did you said that you had contact with a Prothean beacon?"

"I believe I did say that. Why the sudden interest?"

"Tell me, after you had contact with it, did it show you some kind of message or images?"

"Yes, it did. It was hard to understand at first, but in time I managed to make sense of them. A shame that they were only images of what I assumed at the time were Prothean ships."

"What did you do to understand the message? Because I can't make sense of what I saw and it's causing me a headache, I'm even listening to voices inside my head," Saren said with some desperation.

"Interesting, it seems that the download of information was too much for your brain to comprehend. You probably need someone to help you

understand what you saw. So, may I?" she said as she pointed at his forehead.

Understanding where this was going, Saren couldn't help but ask, "Why you of all people? If it's that simple, I can just go to a hospital and ask any Asari doctor to help me out in that regard."

"You could, but then again they wouldn't know how to decipher Prothean information, and as a result it could end badly for both of you."

Blinking in surprise, Saren decided to give it a try. 'I have nothing to lose, and in the worst case, I can at least say that I tried every option,' he thought. "Okay, do it. But hurry up, my radar is picking up activity at the edge of the city."

Nodding in confirmation, Benezia started the meld. At first Saren didn't feel a thing, but suddenly he was standing in an endless sea of black; Benezia right next to him. And just as he saw her, her image was replaced by that of an enormous city consumed by flames and dark smoke. Dozens of pitch black ships and walkers were attacking the city, while ships of a different design attacked the pitch black ships to no avail. Once in a while, one of the dark ships fell, but as a result, the three or four ships that had engaged it ended up badly damaged. The image transitioned to another city. This one, like the one before, was covered in flames and smoke. The streets were filled with bodies and in the distance he spotted the familiar shape of the spear-like things that transformed Turians into abominations back on Magna.

The entire experience took no longer than five minutes, but for Saren it felt like ages, as he could feel the emotions of despair, hate, and hopelessness of the one who put the message on the beacon.

"You okay?" Benezia asked.

"Yea. Yea, just slightly dizzy."

"Good, because we have company," she said as she pointed at the entrance of the temple.

Looking at the direction in which she pointed at, Saren spotted what he assumed used to be an Asari. The being was tall, naked, with sharp claw-like hands, and was surrounded by an unstable biotic field. The being let out a sudden familiar scream before teleporting a few meters towards them. Saren immediately aimed his Phaeston rifle and opened fire while retreating further into the chamber. The mass-accelerated rounds drained the biotic barrier of the being slowly but constantly. Meanwhile, Benezia responded by sending a biotic warp before detonating it with a biotic flare. The biotic explosion draining the last of the being's barriers.

Taking the distraction as an opportunity to reload, Saren aimed his rifle once again, only to hear the horrendous scream before seeing an unstable biotic projectile heading towards him. The unexpected attack caught him by surprise, stalling him long enough for the projectile to make impact. His shields drained immediately before the unstable warp-like attack started working its way through his armor. The being teleported right in front of him as Benezia threw another pair of warps in hopes of distracting it long enough for Saren to escape its

grasp. As it stands, the attacks were to no avail as the being ignored them, opting instead to grab Saren by his neck and lift him up, all the while preparing one of its claws to kill him. Saren took out his pistol, immediately opening fire on the mutated Asari's face and managing to make her throw him against a wall.

Saren stood up, his rib cage hurting as he tried to breath properly. Looking up, he saw a pair of the unstable warps coming towards him, only to be stopped by a biotic barrier, courtesy of Benezia. Nodding in thanks towards her, Saren took out his remaining SMG and opened fire. The projectiles had a lesser effect on the being than his Phaeston or even his Carnifex heavy pistol, but at the moment it was all that he had. In response, the being teleported once again, but this time, towards Benezia's position. Benezia froze in sudden surprise before activating a biotic stasis field, rendering both of them unable to move momentarily. Saren took the opportunity and opened fire on the being's face once again, gaining another scream in response.

The mutated Asari suddenly liberated a biotic explosion with her at the epicenter. The sudden defensive maneuver sent Benezia and Saren flying towards the back wall of the chamber. Looking up, both of them saw the being move slowly towards them before preparing another warp attack. Having no weapon at his disposal, as well as his shield depleted, Saren thought that this was the end for him and his newfound companion. The mutated Asari threw a pair of warp attacks, only for a sudden energy shield bubble to appear between the projectiles and the downed SPECTRE and Matriarch. The defensive move was followed by a rain of green projectiles that tore through the being's armor. Seeing her opportunity, Benezia managed to throw another warp, successfully opening a hole through the being's weakened armor, thus finally killing it. The being let out a final scream before disintegrating into black dust.

Looking to the side, Saren and Benezia saw as a pair of Sangheili materialized out of thin air. The Sangheili moved towards the injured SPECTRE and Matriarch.

"SPECTRE Saren Arterius and Matriarch Benezia?" one of them asked.

Both of them nodded as they followed the two Spec-Ops Sangheili out of the temple.

"Alliance intelligence," the Sangheili said as an introduction, "We have orders to take you back to Thesia ma'am. Agent Arterius, you are needed back at the Citadel."

"I'm needed? What for?"

"As of right now, all SPECTRE agents are required to return to the Citadel in order to defend it. The Heretics and the Loyalist are attacking it as we speak."

Surprise crossed both the Turian and Asari's faces before they nodded and boarded the waiting Pelican outside in the main street. Once inside, the Pelican took off through a hole made in the roof of the cavern. On the surface of the planet, Alliance and Citadel personnel were already departing the area, all of them heading towards the nearest ship capable of taking them to the Citadel.

****XXXXXX****

[Did your team get them?]

"Affirmative Sir, Matriarch Benezia is already on a transport heading towards Thesia. She has been informed already that one of our agents will be contacting her soon. SPECTRE Saren Arterius is currently undergoing medical treatment on the Frigate _Fair Weather_. By the time the ship arrives to the Citadel, he should be ready for action, sir."

[Good. If all ends well by the end of this, the Alliance will have gained the trust of the Citadel. That ought to keep them from snooping too much into the Alliance's affairs for a while.]

"Of course, sir. What about our CERBERUS and ONI agents on the Citadel? Do I order them to take action?"

[Negative, tell them to stick to their cover.]

"Of course, sir."

[We'll speak later, Patterson out.]

With that, the ONI agent ended the transmission and proceeded to send orders to his agents inside Citadel Station, as well as provide the information relayed from the Prowlers in the Serpent Nebula to Alliance command.

****January 7, 2575, 2200 Hours, System Alliance Calendar, Reincarnation System, Arcturus Station.****

Admiral Lasky, alongside Commander Palmer and Fire-team Crimson entered into one of the many conference rooms of the station. Once inside, they noticed that they weren't the only ones summoned by ONI to the meeting. Inside the room were also: SPARTAN-IV Jameson Locke, Holly Tanaka, Olympia Vale, and formerly ODST, now SPARTAN-III, Edward Buck.

Because of his service record, ONI recruited Buck into the SPARTAN-III program after the defense of Phoenix. Once his training finished, Buck was assigned to the recently-formed Fire-team Osiris under Locke's command.

"Now that everyone is here, we can start the meeting," Jason Patterson said as he activated a holographic display, "Everything that you are about to see is classified material, and no one beside us, high-command and Section-3 of ONI know about this, understood?" At seeing everyone nodding, he continued, "Black-box, if you would?"

"Of course, sir. Now, since a few months ago we had been receiving reports of strange anomalies happening in the outer colonies. At first we thought that those anomalies were natural in origin, but after the third colony reported an exact pattern of the event identical to that of the two other colonies, ONI decided to get involved," The hologram changed to a star map of the Systems Alliance's space with red dots in different parts of the map, "Each of these dots indicates a colony where the events have been

registered. As you can see already, the anomalies are getting closer and closer to the heart of Systems Alliance space," The hologram changed once again, but this time to that of a single planet. "It wasn't until a few days ago that we finally managed to get some promising data about these events. Palamok, the Yanme'e's homeworld, was the eleventh victim of this event. Luckily for us, the investigation ship Argent Moon was close enough to the system to make it in time to see this."

This time the hologram changed, showing a colossal avian-like structure floating above a city on the colony, "The unidentified object sent many shockwaves throughout the city before departing via slip-space to an unknown location. Luckily for us, Argent Moon managed to send a probe with the object and gather information on it. Yes, SPARTAN-117, what's your question?"

"If this was the eleventh event, why was it that until now, we hadn't seen or heard anything about that unknown structure?"

"Well, that's because the events have been random and not all the times have been inhabited planets or moons. And until now, all of the anomalies have been in places where population is extremely low and the craters left by the structures were discovered hours or days after the event," Black-box explained. Seeing the Chief nod, he continued, "Now, continuing where I left off, shortly after Argent Moon gathered the information, we lost contact with it. Here is the last transmission received from the ship."

[This is Argent Moon's AI, Singapore. We are under attack by Promethean forces, I repeat, we are under attack by Promethean forces. The Captain and all the crew of the bridge are dead. I repeat, the Captain and the crew on the bridge are dead. Per Cole-Protocol, I'll be entering into stasis mode until discovered or after six-days have passed before destroying the ship or escaping it with all of its data, over.]

The audio transmission ended. Moving towards the hologram, Jason continued the briefing, "Along with the transmission, Singapore managed to send us a bit of the data recollected of the event. According to the data, the VI on the probe sent with the unknown structure managed to find the location of one of those things. Fire-team Osiris, you will be going to Meridian to secure the structure for studying or destruction. Governor Sloan has already been notified of this and he's preparing the local militia for a planetary evacuation and combat against Promethean forces."

"Understood sir," Locke said as he and his team saluted.

"Admiral Lasky," Jason said, "The Infinity will go to Argent Moon's location and aid Fire-team Crimson in the recovery of the ship. Crimson, your priority is the extraction of the data and Singapore. If you have the opportunity to recover Argent Moon, take it; if not, then the Infinity is to destroy the ship after Crimson's extraction."

"Sir, yes sir," responded Lasky and his companions.

"Sir," Lasky said, "Any intel on the Promethean forces that boarded Argent Moon?"

"There is," Jason said before nodding at Black-Box, which in turn changed the hologram to that of three different Prometheans, "The ship was boarded by Crawlers, Knights and a new Promethean class that we haven't seen before. According to Singapore's data, the Knights are an improved version of the ones encountered in Requiem; the main difference being that their armor is extremely resistant to conventional weapons. SPARTANS, if you encounter them, target the glowing cores situated in specific places around their armor or use heavy ordinance to take them out. Regarding the new class of Prometheans, they are mostly unknown but they rely extremely on small but accurate slip-space jumps in order to flank and obtain key positions during combat."

Both Osiris and Crimson teams checked that the information package, regarding the new Promethean forces, was safely stored into their suits' computers for further study.

"Alright, ladies and gentlemen," Jason continued, "you are dismissed. Osiris, head to bay B-13, there's a Prowler in there. Take it. Admiral Lasky, Black-Box will send the coordinates of Argent Moon to Hades. Good luck to everyone."

With that, the ten guests in the conference room saluted to ONI's head before departing. The vivid image of the Forerunner avian-like structure was now stuck in everyone's heads.

A/N: And there's another chapter. Now into the important stuff.

As you may have noticed, I'm almost finished with the Mass Effect 1 arc and I'm planning on including the Halo 5: Guardians plot on my story, or my own AU version of it. What I want to know is:

Should I bring Cortana back (even though I said at the beginning of the story that I wouldn't) or do I keep Cortana dead? I can work towards the same end in this arc with or without her.

Please vote in the poll that is in my profile.

Also, for the eventual question to come regarding my version of Halo 5, yes, Blue Team will make an appearance in future chapters. Though I'm open to recommendations and suggestions regarding them and the Chief.

Finally, if you have any suggestions about this new arc that I'm introducing, please let me know via PM or review.

Thank you for your time and until next time.

End
file.